

XENOPHON'S
CYRUS
THE GREAT



THE ARTS OF
LEADERSHIP
AND WAR

"Still the best book on leadership."—PETER F. DRUCKER

LARRY HEDRICK

E D I T O R

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CYRUS
THE GREAT

ALSO BY LARRY HEDRICK

Rogues' Gallery: America's Foes from George III to Saddam Hussein



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OF LEADERSHIP
AND WAR

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
LARRY HEDRICK



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Medallic portrait of Cyrus the Great on page iv by Bud Wertheimer

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To Barb and Marissa

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INTRODUCTION

BY LARRY HEDRICK

Xenophon of Athens was a historian and a genuine hero of ancient Greece. Born in 431 B.C., he was at the height of his powers when he wrote his *Cyrus* epic. The insights about leadership that are revealed in this book have inspired great men from Julius Caesar to Benjamin Franklin to Lawrence of Arabia.

Far more than most books on leadership, Xenophon's masterpiece possesses deeply ethical and profoundly spiritual qualities, which were to be expected from a man who had sat at the feet of Socrates. There is little doubt that Xenophon was remembering the wisdom that he learned from Socrates during his writing of *Cyrus*.

A descendant of Xenophon's manuscript, *Cyrus the Great* dramatizes the methods of leadership used by the Persian emperor, who is remembered as the most magnificent monarch of the ancient world. The course of Cyrus the Great's career was triumphant throughout, so this book is, quite simply, one of the greatest success stories ever written.

Cyrus the Great (ca. 580–529 B.C.) founded the Persian Empire in the sixth century B.C. by uniting the Medes and the Persians, the two original Iranian tribes. Ultimately, Cyrus' Persian Empire extended from India to the Mediterranean Sea and was the most powerful state in the world until its conquest two centuries later by Alexander the Great. Although Cyrus flourished a century before Xenophon's own time, he was an apt choice to represent the ideal leader. This great Persian's astonishing military successes and mild rule provided just the kind of raw material that Xenophon needed to fashion his portrait of a human paragon.

Plato, another of Socrates's celebrated disciples, praised Cyrus the Great as the very model of an enlightened monarch. What Moses was to the Israelites, Cyrus was to the Persians. When Cyrus conquered Babylon, he was cheered by the Hebrews for freeing them from their captivity and allowing more than forty thousand Jews to leave Babylon and return to the Promised Land. Because of his benevolence and his innermost desire to allow mankind to live

in peace, Cyrus the Great is immortalized in the opening verses of Isaiah 45.

Even those subjugated by Cyrus the Great considered him an eminently just and upright man. Shapour Suren-Pahlav of the University of London notes that the Persians regarded him as the “Father,” the Babylonians as the “Liberator,” the Greeks as the “Law-Giver,” and the Jews as the “Anointed of the Lord.”

A document in the form of a cuneiform cylinder was discovered in 1878 during the excavation of a Babylonian site. That document, in which Cyrus describes his humane treatment of the Babylonians after his conquest of the city, is acknowledged as mankind’s first charter of human rights. In recognition of this achievement, the United Nations published a translation of Cyrus’ Human Rights Charter in each of the official U.N. languages.

The historian Will Durant points out that Cyrus the Great “was the most amiable of conquerors, and founded his empire upon generosity. His enemies knew that he was lenient, and they did not fight him with that desperate courage which men show when their only choice is to kill or die.”

No other leader throughout antiquity can match the scope of Cyrus’ achievements. Though Alexander the Great (356–323 B.C.) is sometimes considered to be a greater military tactician, he indulged in excesses that would have made Cyrus the Great blanch.

Whereas Cyrus treated the peoples he conquered with deep respect, Alexander sometimes urged his soldiers to put civilian populations to the sword. As his domains widened, Alexander increasingly gave himself over to tyrannical methods and monstrous egotism. Had any of Cyrus’ generals acted with a cruelty equal to Alexander’s, he would have been relieved of his duties immediately.

A deeply humane man in his own right, Xenophon would have found it natural to develop a sense of spiritual kinship with the founder of the Persian Empire. They both had many opportunities to master the military virtues: Xenophon’s own leadership skills were sharpened during his service as a battlefield commander where indecision would have meant defeat and death.

Using his renowned eloquence as well as his reputation for personal integrity, Xenophon also excelled as a diplomat and peacemaker. He found it natural to work hand in hand with the Persians who controlled the Greek cities in the western part of what is today Turkey.

Xenophon’s approach to Cyrus was broadly creative rather than narrowly historical. He was far less interested in presenting the plain facts of Cyrus’ biography than in showing how a visionary leader can provide a strenuous and rewarding life for his lieutenants as well as a secure and comfortable existence for his subjects.

In dramatizing Cyrus’ victorious methods, Xenophon shows you how to conduct meetings, become an expert negotiator, deal efficiently with allies, communicate by appealing to the self-interest of your followers, encourage the highest standards of performance, ensure that your organization has the

benefit of specialists, and prove that your words will be backed by your deeds. Those in business can benefit from the rules laid down in *Cyrus the Great*.

Everywhere in Cyrus' imperial enterprise are striking parallels to situations that business managers confront on a daily basis. As portrayed by Xenophon, Cyrus is both a strategist and a tactician; he plans like a CEO but monitors operations like a middle manager. Therefore, you can apply his lessons across the full spectrum of business life, and it will be both instructive and entertaining to find similarities between Cyrus' career and your own.

The editors of "The Crisis in Corporate Governance," a *Business Week* special report, recently wrote, "If the challenge for executives in the 1990s was to transform corporate behemoths into nimble competitors, the challenge in coming years will be to create corporate cultures that encourage and reward integrity as much as creativity and entrepreneurship."

This observation further demonstrates why a renewed interest in Cyrus the Great is significant and timely. Just as Cyrus' honesty, integrity, superb strategic planning, and ability to think on his feet guaranteed his success, the reader too can embody Cyrus' virtues in his own career.

Being human, Cyrus the Great demonstrates his fallibility from time to time, but, as Xenophon unfolds his story, we learn how to recover from mistakes and how to avoid them. When Cyrus strays from the path of virtue and reason, he is overcome by a sense of remorse and he quickly reverses his course. He deals decisively with instances of injustice, and he allows every member of his team, from top to bottom, to approach him with their personal concerns.

It might be supposed that an ancient book would be the last place to look for advice on the importance of adopting new technology, but even in this area Xenophon demonstrates how to stay on the cutting edge (see the final paragraphs of chapter 11).

A Look at Related Classics

Xenophon's significance is so great that he can only be judged against history's greatest thinkers on leadership, men such as Sun Tzu, author of *The Art of War*. Xenophon loses nothing by comparison: He shares the Chinese strategist's laurels as a founder of the art of subtle leadership, but his masterpiece surpasses Sun Tzu's in numerous ways.

In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu records the rules of cunning generalship in brief, undeveloped remarks. The fragmentary nature of these rules inspired later Chinese writers to add their own comments. Yet even with their additions, Sun Tzu's advice frequently fails to close the gap between theory and practice. *Cyrus the Great* succeeds where Sun Tzu did not, closing the gap by using concrete examples to teach leadership.

Thus, although Sun Tzu and Xenophon both stress the need to deceive the

enemy, only Xenophon portrays a specific leader—Cyrus, of course—in the process of doing so. Both recognize the importance of concentrating one's assets with lightning speed, but only Xenophon actually shows you this critical rule in action. All the while, Xenophon presents Cyrus' wisdom within the framework of an entrancing adventure story.

Another classic that is often mentioned in the same breath as Xenophon's *Cyrus the Great* is Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*. You may be surprised to learn that *The Prince* was partly inspired by the work of Xenophon, which Machiavelli had studied and praised. According to the political philosopher Leo Strauss, "there is no moral or political phenomenon that Machiavelli knew or for whose discovery he is famous that was not perfectly known to Xenophon ... in Machiavelli everything appears in a new light, but this is due, not to an enlargement of the horizon, but to a narrowing of it."

Strauss is correct: Machiavelli learned not too much but too little from Xenophon. Compared with *Cyrus the Great*, *The Prince* represents a loss of realization about the nature of the true leader. Machiavelli openly favors the use of deceit, but Xenophon knew that, over the long haul, the careers of the deceitful are marked by disaster. You can easily verify Xenophon's point of view today, when massive corporations have been devastated by the policies of cynical chieftains.

By putting down Machiavelli and taking up *Cyrus*, you can discover the only genuine approach to leadership. Xenophon's advice is always wise and never vicious, not even in the context of war. Thus we remember Socrates's disciple as a great man, and we elevate his calm, collected Cyrus—not Machiavelli's paranoid prince—to the title of ideal leader.

This New Abridged Edition

In editing this classic text, I've cleaned up Xenophon's story line and deleted sections that, with the passage of time, have become difficult to understand. Basing my own version of *Cyrus* on an archaic 1906 translation by Henry Graham Dakyns, I've couched Xenophon's story in language that today's students and business professionals can readily digest. In addition, I've added subheads that reveal the principles of leadership taught by Cyrus or implied by his actions. The new chapter titles are also meant to serve as useful signposts.

To provide the lessons in this book with more impact, I've extended the narrative at a few points, and I've tied up a few loose ends in the plot structure. I've also added material about Xenophon's hero from the Book of Ezra in the Old Testament, which records how Cyrus the Great freed the Hebrews from their Babylonian captivity. The names of some of Xenophon's characters have been changed, making them easier to recognize or pronounce.

As portrayed in the original narrative, Cyrus is usually the center of

attention, but Xenophon writes about his hero in the third person, and he's extremely reluctant to read Cyrus' mind for us. I decided to shift the book's point of view into the first person. This method enabled me to develop the complexity and subtlety of Cyrus' character beyond what's apparent in the original text.

I hope that all readers will be entertained, enlightened, and encouraged by the results.

BOOK I

BOLDNESS AT THE BEGINNING

You will, I believe, recognize me as a legendary leader from the deep past, for I am Cyrus the Great of Persia. In antiquity I was famed throughout the world as a man who won sovereignty over vast territories and scores of great cities. My achievements were so unexpected that many people thought of me as a god. I am now going to tell you how I created my empire, so that you can learn from my thoughts and my deeds.

What really distinguished me was a clear and calculating—yet always benevolent—mind. I was the product of a strict warrior culture, and I learned early on to suppress my emotions and respond to danger with great composure. I was never the plaything of fear or greed. Though I had the advantage of royal birth, it was through my own efforts that I reordered the world as I wished it to be, and I conquered far more by the force of my mental powers than by the strength of my sinews.

Serve as a Moral Compass

You cannot expect your wealth to last for a lifetime unless it's preserved by ethical principles. Whether in industry or in politics, leaders should be building a new, more flexible order for the imperiled generations to come.

To recognize this situation is not to call for a less calculated kind of leadership: It is always the cunning, not the naïve, who rise to power, and leaders must use artfulness to make any organization whatsoever work well. Yet they must never be guided by cynical and self-serving counsels. If they don't call upon their higher selves, they will descend further into petty egotism and tyrannical behavior.

As I teach you to use the set of techniques that I invented for making human beings perform superhuman tasks, you must never forget that my long journey to transfigure the world was as much inward as outward. More than the tale of my material success, this is the story of my soul's high adventure.

How was I trained to achieve such excellence in the art of leadership? My father, always the best of my teachers, was Cambyses, king of the Persians before me. It was he who first inspired me to love humanity, wisdom, and courage. He taught me to endure all labors and undergo all dangers for the sake of heroic achievement. As I grew up, I avoided shameful conduct. Even in my youth, I brought sorrow to no one, for my constant care was to secure the well-being of all around me.

Several years of my early life were spent in Media, the homeland of my

mother Myndane. When I came back to Persia, I spent one more year as a boy among boys. At first the other noble lads taunted me, thinking that I must have learned lazy, luxurious ways in affluent Media. After a time they saw that I was as satisfied with simple Persian fare as they themselves were. My self-control caused the tide to turn in my favor, and the lads started to sing my praises. When it was time for me to join the younger men, I outdid all my fellows in enduring hardship, in paying due respect to authority, and in revering the elderly. It was what my father the king required of me.

To my chagrin, the years of my young life passed away quickly and with little incident. I constantly drilled and hunted with my comrades, but my entire military career consisted of skirmishes on our borders with tribal warriors of little distinction. Since I had the leisure for much study, I took advantage of every opportunity to question merchants from distant lands about the civilizations that lay beyond our Persian horizons.

Absorb as Much Knowledge as Possible

All the learned men at my father's court came to expect my visits. Lending me their best books, they called me the "Well of Knowledge," for I strove to understand all history and everything I could about the world. On the basis of what I learned, I began to daydream about winning a universal empire, for there was something in me that would not rest until I fulfilled a grand destiny. Thus I created an empire in my thoughts long before I began to win an empire in reality.

When I was nearing my thirty-fourth birthday, King Astyages died in Media and his son Syazarees, who was my uncle, inherited the crown. At this juncture Syazarees's great enemy, the king of Assyria, had subdued all the tribes of Syria, Babylonia, Arabia, and Hyrcania. Congratulating himself on his successes, the Assyrian king calculated that, if he could only weaken the Medes, it would be easy for him to extend his empire over all the nations around him—including Persia.

Accordingly, the royal Assyrian sent messengers to every part of his dominions. He ordered them to spread slanders against us Persians and our allies the Medes. Their mission was to remind the world that our two great kingdoms had sealed our ties by marriage and had thereby produced, in my own person, a pretender to the throne of a new empire.

The Assyrian messengers issued warning after warning. If no one checked our rising power soon, they said, we Persians and Medes would fall on each of our neighbors in turn and enslave them one by one, giving a death thrust to freedom. The nations listened to this highly charged propaganda and joined their fates to the Assyrian king's. Those who weren't persuaded by the king's arguments were won over by gifts of gold, for the riches of Assyria were very great.

When I heard of all these things I was puzzled. Why were the Assyrians pointing at me and not at my father the king? Could they have somehow read my thoughts? Perhaps their attacks on my character meant that the hour was ripe for my career to begin in earnest.

Seize the Unexpected Opportunity

In Media, my uncle Syazarees was fully aware of the Assyrian plots and preparations. He sent word to the Persian supreme council and to my father, Cambyses the king. Much to my gratification, Syazarees also appealed directly to me. He begged that I come with all speed at the head of any force that might be provided.

Since fortune had never afforded me the opportunity to display the full extent of my powers, I jumped at the chance to help Uncle Syazarees, whom I remembered well—though not with tremendous affection—from my early years in Media.

With the encouragement of my father, the supreme council appointed me to command an expeditionary force to Media. The council instructed me to choose two hundred men from among the peers, each of whom was ordered to enlist four other noblemen.

Thus a body of a thousand nobles was formed, and each of the thousand had orders to raise thirty commoners—ten javelin throwers, ten slingers, and ten archers. Three regiments were levied from the commons—ten thousand archers, ten thousand slingers, and ten thousand javelin throwers, over and above the thousand officers. A large number, you might say. In different circumstances it might have been but, considering the colossal task that I had in mind, I was starting with barely a handful of men at my command.

As soon as my appointment was confirmed, I offered sacrifices to the gods and, above all, to the Father God. When the omens were favorable, I called all my officers together and addressed them for the first time as their commander.

“My friends,” I began, “I wish to tell you plainly why I’ve accepted this office and why I’m asking for your help. I also want to talk to you about our place in the history of our country.”

My nerves were quiet, but I was intensely aware that the mightiest of the Persian warriors were hanging on my every word. I paused before continuing in a strong and steady voice. “Let us remember our forefathers,” I cried out, “but let us no longer exaggerate their virtues.”

Inspire Your People with an Enticing Vision of a New Order

These words of mine instantly caused a stir, since convention demands that

we idealize the heroes of old. I was quick to support my own point.

“Let me teach you a new way of seeing yourselves in the great scheme of things. We should no longer feel inferior to the men who went before us. Their lives were one long struggle to perform the same deeds that we hold in honor now. Yet, for all their worth, they made few gains for the nation or for themselves. In fact, their enemies seemed to prosper as much as they did. Our forefathers may have displayed wonderful courage, but they failed to reap great rewards.”

Placing my hand on the hilt of my sword, I continued, “I’ve come before you to predict that our own fate will be far different—and far better. It’s not our destiny to fight ceaselessly for small gains. We’re going to win both honor and wealth for Persia and for ourselves, and we’re going to do it quickly.”

Though they had never heard a Persian prince speak in such openly ambitious terms, the officers quickly warmed to my words. As they started to whisper eagerly among themselves, I paused, wanting to tell them about my own overwhelming sense of destiny, wanting to prophesy about the new world that I was now setting into motion.

Know When to Keep Your Own Counsel

I checked myself, however, feeling it unwise to announce the beginning of a campaign of unprecedented scope. In the coming months I would force myself again and again to guard against my own overeagerness. Such self-control was crucial, for many times it led to great victories when self-indulgence might have led to defeats.

The full extent of my plans would gradually be unfolded to my officers. To shock them with the whole truth at the beginning would cause too many of them to shy away. It would also lead to accusations that I was working to overthrow our present form of government, and that was the last alarm I wanted to sound.

Raising my hands for silence, I added, “Your upbringing has made you tough and taught you that success can only be won by hard work. You know what true warriors are. True warriors don’t falter when they’re called upon to perform feats of great endurance. True warriors don’t fall asleep when they ought to remain alert. You are the suitors of Honor herself and, under my leadership, you’ll meet all the challenges that lie ahead.”

After the officers roared in approval, I added, “If you should fail to fulfill my expectations for you, it’s on me that the shame will fall, but I have every confidence in you. I trust you to act always in good faith—as I also trust our enemies to make fools of themselves!”

There was a burst of laughter at this last phrase, yet I truly meant it. My study of history had taught me that humanity has always been full of illusions about its own possibilities, and that ambitious leaders have led their people

into deep affliction more often than wide empire.

Then I said to my officers, “No one can claim that we’re going to war for spoils alone. Our enemy has committed aggression after aggression and our Median allies have called on us to protect them. What’s better than helping a nearby people who are bound to us by sacred treaties?”

Always Give Divinity Its Due

In my earthly days I generally thought about Almighty God rather than “the gods”—for I had been initiated into the secret of His essential oneness by a wise tutor in my youth. But since my officers felt safer when I appealed to all the gods, I often kept to the form that suited them best.

Therefore, I now said, “We have still another reason for optimism. In opening this campaign I haven’t—and you haven’t—forgotten the gods. In all things, great and small, I work to win their blessing. They’ve received sacrifice after sacrifice from our priests, who have seen nothing but good omens. So let’s go forth in the expectation of victory!” The officers roundly cheered, shouting out the names of the gods that they loved and trusted most.

“And now,” I finished, “let’s be about our business. I leave you to finish your preparations, and I know that you’ll soon be marching into Media at the head of your troops. Meanwhile I’ll return to my father and go before you to meet our great ally, my uncle Syazarees.”

Thus I set out for the war, and my father Cambyses accompanied me over the first many miles of the journey. With a large party of peers and imperial guards following close behind, we were no sooner clear of the city than we met with favorable omens of thunder and lightning. “The gods themselves,” my royal father observed, “favor our cause and our power.” After that we went forward without further consultation with the priests, for we felt that no man could mistake the benevolence of such signs from above.

“I remember,” I said to my father, “how I once heard you say that dealing with gods and dealing with men weren’t such different things. A prince, you taught me, should honor both gods and men during his days of good fortune, so that both men and gods will remember him in his time of need.”

True Leadership Is Making People All They Ought to Be

“True, my son,” said the king, “and do you remember the other things we talked about? We discussed how wonderful it would be if a man could train himself to be both ethical and brave, and to earn all he needed for his household and himself. That kind of man, we agreed, would be appreciated by the whole world. But if a man went further still, if he had the wisdom and the skill to be the guide and governor of other men, supplying all their needs and

making them all they ought to be, that would be the greatest thing of all.”

“Yes, sire,” I answered. “I remember very well. I agreed with you that governing well is the most important task of all, but today when I think of the treacherous cunning of many men who wear crowns—creatures like the king of Assyria—I can only think of how dishonorable it would be to let them remain in power.”

I turned to observe my father’s face and was relieved to see that he, as usual, remained serene. I felt free to further unburden my heart. “What angers me are all those kings who are fabled for the heaps of gold in their coffers, and their freedom from trouble and pain. I have a different vision. I say that the true leader shuns luxury and ease. Once in power, he should want to work harder than ever.”

“You’re right, my son, but isn’t it a bit too early to talk like that?” Cambyases asked. “Concentrate first on the pursuit of victory, which requires more effort than anything else. You need to make logistics your initial concern. If supplies don’t reach your army in good time, your authority will crumble.”

Err on the Side of Self-Reliance

“Yes,” I answered, “and that is why my uncle Syazarees has promised to feed all of us who join him.”

“Do you really mean,” asked my father, “that you’re relying only on the supplies of Syazarees for this campaign of yours?”

“Well, yes,” I answered with hesitation. “At least in the beginning.”

“Do you know how substantial his supplies are?” “No,” I confessed, “I don’t know the details, but Syazarees assures me there’s plenty for us all.”

“So you’re prepared to rely on what you can’t guarantee? Then you don’t seem ready for all the problems that your army might face.”

“I have faith in my ability to improvise,” I quietly said.

“But,” insisted my father, “suppose Syazarees actually means to deceive you—how would your soldiers fare then?”

I didn’t hesitate to embrace the suggestion that Syazarees might turn out to be an unreliable ally. “If Syazarees breaks his word to us, my army won’t fall apart. We’ll mobilize and find resources on our own.”

“Good,” said the king. “The supreme council and I have given you a superbly trained force of infantry that I wouldn’t trade for any other, not even one that’s twice as big. If we can trust Syazarees, you’ll have the cavalry of Media to support you, which may be the finest in the world. With such power at your command, the territories you cross will be eager to resupply you. Still, you must always plan ahead, so that you’ll always have some means of keeping your army well supplied.”

“You can be sure that I’ll follow your advice, Father,” I vowed.

“Excellent! And remember: Never be slow in replenishing your supplies. You’ll always be on better terms with your allies if you can secure your own provisions, and you’ll increase the loyalty of your soldiers. Give them all they need, and your troops will follow you to the ends of the earth.”

“Yes, Father,” I said, tempted to add that the ends of the earth were exactly where I proposed to take them. Yet, though I trusted my father entirely, I wanted to provoke no sermon on the dangers of ambition. Why, at any rate, should he think me capable of great conquests, given my limited experience in the field? Early on, you can expect no one to believe in your destiny as much as yourself.

BOOK II

ADVICE FIT FOR ROYALTY

My father went on, asking, “Do you understand the basic reason why followers stay loyal to their leaders? And do you know the basic reason why followers desert their leaders?”

“The loyalty of followers comes from self-interest,” I readily replied. “When they determine that their leader is no longer acting in their self-interest, their sense of loyalty collapses.”

“So the first thing you have to do is ensure that everyone who serves you enjoys high morale and good health. Are you prepared to do that?”

“Yes, Father,” I assured him. “My own words and deeds will bolster their morale and, as for good health, an excellent staff of surgeons and physicians will come out with the army.”

Cambyeses replied, “When soldiers are sick or wounded, doctors can fix them up, but you’ve got to save them from falling ill in the first place. If you’re planning to camp long in one place, you’ve got to find a healthy site. And even as you’re working to ensure the health of your army, you must remember to take care of your own.”

“Just so,” I agreed, “and my first rule is to avoid overeating. My next is to stay trim and strong by working off all the energy that food lends to my body.”

Let No One Fall Idle

“Yes, my son,” Cambyeses responded, “that’s the right way, and you need to make sure that your men adopt the same good practices. If an army is to win through to victory, it has to spend all its time helping itself or hurting its foe. Therefore, an army should never be idle.”

“Never idle,” I repeated. “And I know a way to keep them in top form. I’m going to conduct competitions in every kind of arms, and I’ll offer rich prizes to the winners. These games will increase their confidence, and I’ll soon have an army ready to do anything I require of them.”

“Just so,” said the king.

“And, when it comes to kindling their enthusiasm,” I continued, “there’s nothing like the power of hope for victory and its rewards.”

“True,” answered Cambyeses, “but you must never arouse hopes that you can’t fulfill. When a leader arouses false expectations too often, he loses his power to inspire—even when success is really within reach. A leader shouldn’t promise great results when he can’t know what the outcome will be.

His officers may step in to paint rosy pictures, but he should reserve his own credibility for crises of supreme danger—and not waste it in the early going.”

“By heaven, Father, your ideas are so close to mine!” I enthused. “As for enforcing obedience, I hope I’ve had some training in that already. You began my education yourself when I was a child by teaching me to obey you, and then you handed me over to masters who also demanded obedience. When my fellows and myself were lads, our governors stressed discipline more than anything else.”

Obedience Should Not Be the Result of Compulsion

“But that,” said Cambyses, “can result in the obedience of compulsion. There’s a shorter way to a higher goal—the goal of voluntary obedience. People are quick to obey the person who’s wiser than themselves. A sick man will beg a doctor to guide him back to health, and a whole ship’s company will listen to an experienced captain. Likewise, travelers cherish the guide who knows the safest way. But if people think that obedience will lead them to disaster, then nothing—not punishments, not persuasion, not even bribes—will get them to come along. For no sane man can be lured to his own destruction.”

I remarked that the best way to secure obedience is to be both wiser and better informed than those we rule.

“To be sure,” said the king. “If you wish to be thought a good estate manager, or a good horseman, or a good physician, or a good flute player without really being one, just imagine all the tricks you have to invent just to keep up appearances. You might succeed at first, but in the end you’re going to be exposed as an impostor.”

“Yes,” I said, “and in the long run, we mortals need the help of the gods to stay on the path of wisdom.”

“Surely, my son. Divine favor is the ultimate foundation of human success, but the gods often throw a person back on his own resources. Therefore you must plan for every possible turn of events.”

“And we have to convince our people that they’re going to be as safe in the future as they are today.”

Imagining Disaster May Save You from Tragedy

“That’s correct,” said the king, “but guarding them from evil isn’t always possible. Only one way is always open, and that’s the way of sympathy. Be happy with people in their prosperity, but when the wheel of fortune turns and evil days arrive, you must also share in their sorrow. Use foresight. Imagine what disasters may lie in wait for your people and guard against them. If the

evil you foresee can't be prevented, you should at least cushion your people against its worst effects."

My father then started to discuss what he called the virtue of emulation. "Leaders must always set the highest standard. In a summer campaign, leaders must always endure their share of the sun and the heat and, in winter, the cold and the frost. In all labors, leaders must prove tireless if they want to enjoy the trust of their followers."

"Yes," I said, "a leader must always be more steadfast in adversity than those he leads."

"Just so," said Cambyses, "and be sure of this: The exceptional leader and the private soldier may be alike in body, but their afflictions aren't the same. The suffering of the leader is always lightened by his glory. As much as possible, you must let others share in your glory, so that they never lose heart."

I felt the truth of this at once, and I felt it more fully than I had ever thought possible. In a flash I developed the idea further. I would indeed have the tremendous psychological advantage of wielding command, always knowing far more about the army's situation than the troops themselves, yet I would never be able to share all my knowledge with the mass of men. How much they would have to trust me! How often I'd have to prove myself worthy of command! I whispered a prayer to God, and then I brought my flight of thought back to earth.

"But now, Father," I said, "imagine that the decisive hour has come, and you, as the head of the army, are satisfied that your troops are well supplied. You know that they're healthy and strong. They're eager to show their courage and determined to gain victory with honor. Shouldn't the battle be joined at once?"

Stealthiness Can Be Employed with Honor

"Only if you're likely to gain by the move!" said my father. "The more I'm persuaded of my own superiority and the high morale of my troops, the more I'm inclined to stand on my guard and make sure that I've thrown the enemy off balance. For if a leader wants to guarantee success, he has to outwit his opponent at every turn."

"What exactly do you mean?" I asked.

"You know what I mean," said the king. "I've trained you to be as honest as any man who ever lived, but if virtue serves to guide our actions with our friends and allies, every sort of trick can be used against our enemies. That's why you were taught never to hunt a lion or a bear without some special advantage. Didn't that kind of lesson teach you cunning and deceit?"

"I wouldn't couch it in exactly those terms," I pretended to grumble.

"Yet that's what you were doing when you joined in the hunt," said

Cambyses. “You were practicing cunning and deceit—not among men, it’s true, but among beasts. We made sure you never turned those tactics against your friends, but we wanted them to help guide your actions when faced with ferocious men who are bellowing for your death.”

It was the full afternoon of a bright, hot day, and both my father and I paused to drink from our flasks. Then the king said, “Our unwritten law commands that we teach our children as we teach our servants—simply not to lie. Neither child nor servant is allowed to cheat or be envious. If they do, they’re punished. The hope is to make them honest subjects. In the same way, we don’t talk to the young about the mysteries of love, for if their passions were ignited, they’d become the slaves of lust. But when noble boys come of age, it’s time to teach them how to deal with our enemies, and we don’t worry that they’ll turn violent with their own comrades.”

Using Unexpected Tactics Confuses the Foe

“Well,” I said, “I agree that good leaders must plot and plan to catch the enemy out of formation, especially when he’s crossing difficult ground while we stay out of sight, resting quietly, waiting for his exhausted troops to come into range so we can catch them off guard. And it’s best of all to catch the enemy asleep while our own men are fully awake with weapons in hand.”

“Both of you must stop to eat and sleep,” added the king. “For better or worse, whatever the roads are like, both of you will be forced to use them. Keep all these situations in mind, and wherever you’re weaker than the enemy, be most on your guard, and wherever your foe is more vulnerable, attack without mercy.”

“Yes,” I observed. “A subtle leader can lure the enemy on and then throw him off his guard. He can allow himself to be pursued and then turn to destroy his pursuers.”

“You speak well!” said Cambyses. “Remember that leaders must be creative and invent stratagems for use against the foe. In war the newest stratagems work best because they’re unexpected. Being unexpected, they offer you the best chance of confusing the enemy.”

“True, sire, and I understand what you meant when you recommended hunting as a way to learn war. As a boy, I used to get up at night in the dead of winter and make my way through the forest to hunt. When I went out after rabbits, I took two breeds of dogs, one to track my prey by scent and another to cut off their retreat and run them down. Even if the rabbits escaped my dogs, I knew all their runs and hiding places by heart. There I would spread my nets, and the rabbits’ own speed would fling them into my snares.”

Wise Words Stimulate Inventiveness

“If you can act just as stealthily against enemy armies,” said the king, “you’ll soon have no foes left to fight. And even if you have to fight your enemies on equal terms in the open field, you can still turn their attempts at deception to your own advantage.”

“I understand that, and I thank you, Father,” I said, bowing toward the king from my waist, “for helping me think more clearly about the tasks that lie ahead. Your words encourage my creativity.”

I could see that my father found my praise heartwarming, and in return he had kind words for me. “You’ve always been the best of students. That’s a very encouraging fact—since I must soon turn back to Pasargadae, our capital! Before I do, I want you to recall a few more things that are worth bearing in mind.”

“Such as, my father?”

“Never forget that your men expect you to protect them. They’ll lose all confidence in you if you neglect their safety and interests, so you must never know a careless moment. When it’s night, you must think about what your troops will do when it’s day. When it’s day, you must think of how best to use the night.”

“Just so,” I said.

“For the rest, you don’t need me to tell you how you should draw up your troops or conduct your march, or make camp and post your pickets, or guard against a cavalry charge or an attack from lancers or archers. You’ve heard all that I know about these things—and a hundred more—many times over, and you’ve studied the works of the great generals who recorded their methods for posterity.”

“Yes,” I said, “I know all their theories, and I’m eager to apply them soon.”

Profit from the Folly of Others

“But there’s one particular teaching,” Cambyses added, “that I must impress on you again, for it’s the greatest of them all. Remember the lessons of history. Remember how often whole peoples have allowed themselves to be persuaded to go to war by ‘wise’ men—and then been utterly destroyed by the very enemy they agreed to attack! Remember how many statesmen have helped raise new leadership to power—and then been overthrown by their own protégés! Remember how often leaders have chosen to treat their friends like slaves—and then perished in the revolutions caused by their idiotic methods! How many powerful men have craved to dominate the world—and by overreaching have lost everything they once possessed!”

These words pierced my heart. Perhaps God himself was using my father’s tongue to warn me against my own ambition. Again I felt alone. No one knew

how much I hoped to accomplish with my army, and I reminded myself that my self-confidence should always ride side by side with a strong sense of humility. I must always be on the lookout for warnings from heaven to temper my desires. Yet, even with the full force of these thoughts in mind, I couldn't doubt that I was meant to pursue a great destiny. I would proceed with tremendous care, but I would proceed as far as fate would allow me to go.

"Truly, men often fail to understand their own weaknesses," I said neutrally, "and their lack of self-knowledge can bring terrible disasters down on their own heads."

"Yes, so we must always be on guard against miscalculation. Foresight isn't humanity's forte: We lack the vision to detect the best course," concluded my father. "But the gods, my son, know everything that the future will bring. If we mortals win their favor, they will send signs to tell us what we ought to do—and what we ought to leave undone."

So I was able to take heart again at the words of my father. They sounded like a blessing.

BOOK III

RULES TO COMPETE BY

As my father and I rode on toward our border with Media, we were greeted by a good omen: A mighty eagle with huge wings swept into view from our right. Silhouetted against snow-capped blue mountains, it flew before us as though to lead the way, and so we and our retainers crossed into Media, the kingdom of my uncle Syazarees.

Once across we asked the Median gods to receive us graciously. When we had finished our prayers, my father and I embraced one another, and then Cambyses turned back into Persia.

At first my spirits sank at my father's departure, but I reminded myself how kind he had been to come with me, mile upon mile, to ensure that I began my career with his wisdom fresh in my memory. Now everything depended upon my own powers—and on the will of God.

So I went forward to meet Syazarees. On the fifteenth evening, at the end of my journey, I came face to face with him, and we greeted one another as kinsmen.

For the duration, his dwelling was a huge and sumptuous campaign tent that held a portable throne. Surrounded by his generals, he was armored like a hero, and he wore his robes of office, in which ten thousand threads of gold and silver glowed against a deep royal purple, like a peacock.

By comparison, I looked almost like a common soldier. My beard had become unkempt during the journey, but his had been dressed with the greatest care, and I thought he must have dyed both beard and hair, for they seemed even darker than in my memories of him from youth.

Exude Confidence, Not Anxiety

The whole effect was meant to identify him as a god in human dress, but he did not impress me. After talking with Syazarees for only a few minutes, I could tell that, though his intelligence was sound enough, there was little of the divine spark in his spirit.

He seemed only half awake to the extraordinary responsibilities of his office, and he exuded far more anxiety than confidence. Back in Persia, I had read a report that said Syazarees ruled more by force than by virtue; after a few minutes in his presence, I agreed with what I had read.

Rather than welcoming me like a gentleman and recalling the past that we

had shared, Syzarees immediately started asking questions that revealed his doubts and fears. First he demanded to know how great an army I had brought with me.

“My troops number over thirty thousand,” I said. “Many are men who have served with you before as mercenaries. After the first contingent, even more fresh troops will be coming from my father and the supreme council.”

“How many of those?” asked Syzarees.

I answered, “Their numbers may not satisfy you entirely, but remember that these nobles of ours, though few, find it easy to rule our Persian people, who are many.”

“Will these men prove hardy on campaign?”

“I’m sure you’ll find them superior in every way,” I said. Now it was my turn to be the questioner. “Tell me, Uncle, where’s the enemy army now?”

“There’s no danger of immediate attack, but they’re advancing all the time,” Syzarees said, “and they’re coming after us in very impressive numbers.” He repeated with more emphasis, “*Very* impressive numbers!”

Recognize the Inevitability of Conflict

“What makes you so certain?”

“Because,” Syzarees explained impatiently, “many of their deserters have come over to us, and all of them tell the same tale.”

“Then we must give battle,” I said calmly.

“We have no choice,” Syzarees replied with an edge of desperation in his voice. It may seem paradoxical, but the weakness of my uncle’s character was proving a tonic to my own. His defects, I thought, would provide me with plenty of opportunities to dramatize my strengths.

“How large are the enemy’s numbers—and how large are your own?” I asked. “Tell me so we can make our plans.”

Syzarees gave me detailed information about what numbers and types of soldiers would be fighting for the Assyrian king.

I summarized, “So you believe the total numbers of the enemy are something like sixty thousand cavalry and two hundred thousand archers and javelin throwers. How big is your own army?”

My uncle announced that Media would furnish over ten thousand cavalry and maybe as many as sixty thousand lightly armored troops—that is, archers and javelin throwers. “From our neighbors, the Armenians,” he added, “we’re looking to get four thousand cavalry and twenty thousand infantry.”

“So you calculate our cavalry at less than a quarter of the enemy’s, and our infantry at less than half.”

Syzarees scowled, acknowledging the truth of the numbers.

“So,” I observed, “even if all the fit warriors in Persia were to appear here suddenly, we’d still be outnumbered by the enemy.”

In the Face of Danger, Be Eager, Not Intimidated

“That’s how matters stand,” said my uncle. A mood of fatigued resignation seemed to have suddenly fallen over him. I thought it strange that a man so easily intimidated should be widely considered a greater, more powerful king than my father.

The day had faded completely, and now it was torchlight that flickered on my face and those of the Medes. Under the flames my uncle’s face assumed an almost sinister cast.

I turned away from him and looked into the night. Over the humped mountains to the east, the moon—a God-stone three-quarters full—was rising. I let the silence grow for effect before I stated, “As for my men, they’re joining us even as we speak.”

Syazarees came to my side, where he could confirm this fact for himself. The silver glow from above revealed great clouds of dust in the distance where my Persian soldiers were carefully making their way through the moon-brightened shadows.

“You’ll admire their efficiency,” I promised the king, “but as they’re now armed, they can’t be as effective as I’d like them to be. If you can equip every one of them as heavy infantry,” I continued, “I think we’ll succeed. Otherwise, we might go down to defeat when matched against such superior numbers.”

The idea was one that I’d been pondering for several days. I held my breath while Syazarees considered the matter. Just when I thought he’d reached a decision, he drew two of his generals aside for consultation. They spoke in their own tongue. I knew the language of the Medes but they were muttering; so I understood no more than the odd phrase.

After a prolonged period with their heads together, the two generals stood back and the king approached me again. “All right, then,” he said. “You’ll have enough heavy weapons and armor for all your men.”

Let Your Tools Be Equal to the Task

I felt a moment of rapture, but I laid a mask of inscrutability over my features and acted as though I had only received my due.

Syazarees made good on his word and, by the end of the next day, new arms were issued to all of my troops. Thus the prospects of the empire that I planned to create received an early boost from a man of little vision.

Now even my commoners, who constituted the great majority of the army, had the kind of weapons that were necessary to close with the enemy: swords, maces, and shields. This change would make them far more effective than the mere archers and javelin throwers that they’d been in Persia.

Try as I might, I couldn't imagine that either my father or the supreme council would find fault with my upgrading of the army, though I later learned that voices had been raised against me on this account. To tell the truth, there were murmurs against me even among the nobles who made up my officer corps.

The vast majority of the peers, however, realized that we now possessed both the men and the materiel to create a much stronger force, and my eloquence made them eager to tutor their formerly light-armored troops in the arts required by heavy infantry.

To strengthen the argument, I reminded the nobles that light-armored troops—who normally operate at a good distance behind the front lines—had been known to miss their enemy and hit their own comrades with arrows and javelins. This danger was now at an end, for the commoners would henceforth be fighting shoulder to shoulder with the elite officers, all of whom were peers (that is, aristocrats).

Address Different Audiences with Different Emphases

When speaking with the commoners, I was a little less forthcoming. To those who were reluctant to join us officers in the thick of the fray, I played down the superior training of the nobility. Weren't we all—peer and commoner alike—sons of the sacred soil of Persia? Though the peers had received a unique education, they were far from being supermen.

I continued, appealing to the hopes of the commoners, who had been so much poorer than the nobility from time immemorial. Here at last, I said, was a chance for anyone, no matter how lowly born, to gain riches and achieve an altogether higher status. A whole new world of opportunity was opening up. They would do well—I assured them—to seize this rare chance. To my tremendous satisfaction they did.

Were these democratic reforms illegal in the strictest sense of Persian law? Perhaps—but Persia was far away, and my revolution went forward with firm opposition from no one. One thing was certain: I would never be able to take my new formations back to the homeland. Strictly speaking, it was no longer a Persian army. I had rearmed it so that it might serve as the core of a new imperial force in the world. To return with it to Persia would create seismic fractures in the homeland's class system.

The Assyrians and their allies were still far away, so there was plenty of time to rouse my army's spirit by holding competitions in the martial arts. I gave generous prizes to the regiments, companies, and squads that proved themselves most loyal to their leaders and most zealous in the practice of their skills.

With each passing day the commoners, though consistently bested in their contests against the peers, became more comfortable with their new weapons.

A cynic might almost say that I was encouraging class warfare, but that observation would be wide of the mark. My aim was to arouse the army's competitive spirit, not to betray the ways of our ancestors.

In directing my army's encampment, I specified that every noble officer was to sleep in a large tent with his commoners. Thus the army camped by regiments, and the men perceived that they were all treated alike. No commoner could pretend that he was being slighted, and no one could claim to have reason for holding back when facing the foe.

Minimize Distinctions of Rank

I deeply believe that leaders, whatever their profession, are wrong to allow distinctions of rank to flourish within their organizations. Living together on equal terms helps people develop deeper bonds and creates a common conscience. Those who live together are far less likely to desert one another in a crisis; those who live apart are far more likely to pursue their narrow self-interest.

As I had hoped, the common life soon led to marked improvements in the discipline of the regiments. Using my roughly democratic approach, all my officers—generals, brigadiers, and company captains—could keep their commoners in perfect order on the march. Such high morale minimizes disorder and quickly reestablishes order whenever it's broken.

A leader must always stress the importance of teamwork. You can't just tell your followers how precious they are in your eyes. You must stamp out any suggestion of overbearing elitism in your higher ranks—and you must ensure that such elitism will never rise again. Then your teams will work smoothly and cheerfully together.

Giving too many privileges to senior personnel can only damage morale. The struggle between nobles and commoners will always exist at some level, but when mutual suspicions are neutralized by working together closely toward common goals, this tension can be energizing rather than debilitating.

There was a further matter over which I took great care in preparing my army for its first battle: I wished no man—officer or commoner—to eat his breakfast until he had sweated for it. Thus I would lead the men out to the hunt or make sure their work left them well exercised before they sat down to the table.

This regimen gave them zest for their food and increased their endurance, and work itself was a means for making the men more cooperative with one another. Their experience of shared discipline increased the courage of my followers whenever they faced the foe.

Create Comradeship and Community by Sharing

Pleasures

Even before I left Persia, I had ordered that my own great tent be enlarged to hold all the guests that I might want to entertain. As a rule I'd invite such officers as the occasion seemed to call for, but sometimes I also summoned commoners. I'd invite a squad of five or ten men from the ranks, or an entire company, or even a whole regiment. There were also many individuals under my command who received special invitations to honor their exceptional accomplishments. Whatever the rank of those who attended my banquets, they always enjoyed the same quality and quantity of food that was served to me.

I insisted that the slaves among us develop the same virtues as those in higher stations, and I allowed these servants to share and share alike with the soldiers in everything. As long as they did their duty each day, those with the least rank were to be honored just as much as heralds and ambassadors.

The slaves were tasked with being loyal, quick, intelligent, and courageous in the line of duty. They were expected to anticipate every need of the men they served, and they were never to imagine themselves above their work. Their sense of self-esteem was just as crucial to their proper performance as their humility, and I'd have been a fool if I'd neglected to include them in the general spirit of the enterprise.

Whenever my troops and I dined together, my constant concern was to keep the talk both lively and educational. I discovered that the best way to succeed in this aim was to use wit. After I started the exchanges going, the men were encouraged to tell their most entertaining stories, and I was eager to join in the laughter.

One evening when I'd happened to invite no commoners to the feast, the officers' tales were particularly amusing, but a gloomy aristocrat named Aglaitadas, whose mood usually hovered between sour and cynical, turned to me and said, "Cyrus, do you really believe these stories are true?"

"Certainly!" I answered with a wink and a smile. "Why should my officers tell lies?"

"Why," said Aglaitadas, "simply to make merry and glorify themselves at the same time. What impostors!"

Treat Cynics to the Ridicule They Deserve

I cut him short. "Pipe down, and don't use such ugly names! It's for *me* to tell *you* what an impostor is. An impostor is a man who claims more wealth and courage than he actually possesses. He's a man who begins what he can never finish. On the other hand, those who can make their friends laugh are men of good taste."

My general Hestifer, whose jokes had made us laugh hardest that evening, spoke up and said, "We were only trying to lift up your heart, Aglaitadas.

What would have happened if we'd tried to make you cry? What if we'd acted like the ballad singers and storytellers who tell sad tales, reducing their audience to tears? Even as it is, you're holding us up to shame."

"Only as you deserve," Aglaitadas growled. "Jokes are never of any use. Fathers teach their sons to grow up by causing them pain, and the law works only because criminals are punished until their spirits are broken, but can you jesters say you do anyone good? Can smiles make a man a better commander or a better citizen?"

Hestifer answered back, "Take my advice, Aglaitadas, and save your remarks for our enemies. Once we've conquered, you can share your views with them. In the meantime, give us—your friends—the gift of laughter. You must have a lot of the stuff stashed away somewhere, since you've never wasted a smile on any man—not if you could help it. You've got no excuse for being stingy now, and you can't refuse us a grin."

"I see," complained Aglaitadas, "that you're trying to get me to laugh."

Another officer put in, "If he is, Hestifer is wasting his time. You might strike fire out of our friend Aglaitadas, but not so much as a single laugh—not one!"

At this remark all the officers erupted in merriment, and even Aglaitadas couldn't help himself. He smiled.

Seeing his somber face light up, I shouted, "Come now, we're very wrong to corrupt such a man, forcing him to join us in the misery of laughter!"

Toil Up the Steep Ascent

After a time I turned the subject to serious matters. "Gentlemen," I said to my officers, "let's talk about discipline within our army, and let's consider our danger from no-account leaders. Unfortunately, such rogues sometimes find more followers than good leaders. Promising everyone a good time with plenty of instant rewards, these scoundrels can exert much more influence than virtuous men, who end up alone on steep, rocky paths."

My words took effect at once. Looking out over the many faces in the great tent, I added, "Misleaders are slow to work hard but quick to act on greed. They convince their men that dishonest behavior leads to great wealth. Let's banish these misleaders from among us, and when we do, we shouldn't fill their places from our Persian peerage alone. As our journey continues, we're going to be joined by many races of men. Just as we choose our horses from the best stocks, not limiting ourselves to our national breed, we should choose the best men to join us in the work of command, regardless of their country or color."

A general hum of agreement greeted my advice. "Remember too," I added, "that getting rid of scoundrels ends the danger of contamination for the rest of the army. Men are drawn closer to virtue when they see the dishonor that falls

on misleaders.”

So I spoke, and my officers promised to do as I advised.

The hours passed quickly away in my great tent, until at last the third libation was poured out while we lowered our heads in prayer to the gods. So the officers broke up and went away to sleep in the same tents as their new comrades, the commoners.

BOOK IV

SEIZE THE DAY

As it turned out, the Assyrian king was in no great hurry to challenge our Persian-Mede alliance. This unexpected interlude seemed to suit Syazarees my uncle, but it left me restless. I understood, as he apparently did not, that long delays undermine the morale of soldiers, and I resolved to take the initiative against the foe.

At least my officers and commoners could continue to practice and compete against one another, and I grew prouder and prouder of their progress. The commoners had gradually developed great expertise in the use of their new weapons, but there were times when my little revolution threatened to get out of hand, for the commoners were becoming terribly ferocious in their combat games with the nobles. With the new sense of opportunity that I had planted in their hearts, the commoners now expected to win half of the prizes. When they failed to do so, their mood turned ugly.

There was only one remedy for this situation. In action against the enemy, both officers and commoners would find release from their hardening rivalries. I harbored no doubt that imminent danger would reawaken their sense of fellowship.

Direct the Energy of Internal Rivalries Outward

All bickering would then cease, and no man would be jealous of his comrade's arms or his passion for glory. As the critical hour approached, everyone would cast away all thoughts of rivalry, and they would see their comrades for what they really were—their closest allies in the struggle for the common good.

One morning I ordered my entire force to assemble under arms, and I drew them up in battle array, using all my skill to make the display as artful as possible. From out of the ranks I then summoned my chief officers—generals, brigadiers, and company captains—and led them along the lines, applauding the newfound perfection of the combined forces, nobles and commoners alike. Then I ordered my officers to return to their regiments and repeat my praises to the men, so that my words could inspire the whole army.

The next morning at daybreak, I ordered my Persians to assemble on the parade ground near Syazarees's resplendent tent. I inspected them with satisfaction and set them at ease. Then, with a few senior officers at my side, I

sought out my uncle.

After receiving permission to enter his presence, I greeted him warmly and said, “What I’m about to suggest must also be in your own mind, dear uncle. Perhaps you’ve hesitated to say it out of tact.”

At first Syazarees seemed almost intimidated by my presence. For a moment I had the mad idea that he was physically afraid of my generals and me. Would we pull out our daggers and assassinate him? Perhaps I’d been heavy-handed in assembling my men nearby without first telling him what was afoot. Since I aimed to force his hand, however, I wanted to remind him that—thanks in part to his help—my army had become far more formidable in recent weeks.

Couch Your Own Ambition in Terms of Its Benefits to Others

If he had experienced a moment of terror, Syazarees quickly overcame it, composing himself as he sat on his throne. He set his face into an expression of mild surprise but said nothing.

“Since you choose to remain silent,” I continued, “let me speak for both of us. Our preparations for war are complete, and we Persians all agree that we shouldn’t wait until the enemy invades your territory to show them what we’re made of. We’re eager to move forward and attack the enemy in his own territory. While we stay in our camp here with our bellies needing more food every day, we’re draining your kingdom in spite of ourselves. But once across the border we’ll support ourselves by seizing the bounty of Assyria.”

With whatever degree of sincerity, Syazarees took me by the hand and thanked me for my consideration. “You are certain that you want to follow such a course?” he asked.

I replied, “If going forward were more dangerous than staying here, the wiser plan would be to stay. Whether we stay or go, the enemy’s numbers will be much the same—and so will our own—but the spirit of our soldiers will rise higher and higher if we’re all marching against the foe and not wasting our time here.”

Syazarees seemed lost in thought as I added, “As for the enemy, his confidence will be shaken when he hears that we haven’t hunkered down in defensive positions.”

“Your point is compelling,” admitted Syazarees. He then glanced at his generals, who remained wary, expressing neither approval nor disapproval.

Create a Psychological Advantage by Seizing the Initiative

“Yes,” I said, “and even if we only gain a psychological advantage, that can mean the difference between victory and defeat. I’m reminded of the words of my father the king, who says that battles are decided more by the morale of the troops than by their bodily strength.”

Syazarees dismissed me abruptly, obviously wanting to confer with his senior officers. A long hour passed before he called me back.

Taking me by the arm, Syazarees said, “Nephew, both you and all your men must realize that it’s no trouble for me to provide you with supplies. But I agree that the time’s ripe to advance into the enemy’s territory, and you’re not going alone. I’m ordering the entire army to move out.”

“Then,” I said triumphantly, “let’s make our final preparations and, after consulting the omens, set forth at once.”

To my pleasure, Syazarees agreed to let my forces follow immediately behind his cavalry.

I ordered my soldiers to prepare for the march, and they were so happy to be moving out that they seemed victors already. I offered sacrifices to Almighty God and to the other gods in due order, and soon the priests saw the omens turn favorable. So I mustered my army on the frontier.

With the Median horsemen preceding us, I led my infantry across the border into the Assyrian Empire. We made a short day’s march, and then I ordered them to encamp. Meanwhile Syazarees’s cavalry dispersed over the land and captured spoils of every kind. What they missed was eventually scavenged by my own men on foot.

Seek Independence of Action

Every time we Persians and Medes moved our camp a day’s march ahead, there were abundant new supplies to harvest from the enemy. I rejoiced, feeling more relaxed in my role because I was no longer so dependent on my uncle.

Finally word came of the Assyrian king’s advance: He and his army were said to be barely four days off. At that point I went to Syazarees and declared, “The hour has come, Uncle, and now let’s advance directly at the enemy. Neither friend nor foe should think we’re afraid. Let’s show them that we’re eager for the fight, Your Majesty.”

Syazarees agreed, and the army moved forward in good order. We were careful to take our evening meal by daylight, and at night we lit no fires. Instead, we made bonfires on the leading edge of the camp so that we might see our assailants in case of attack.

We drew nearer and nearer to the foe, until only four miles separated us. We’d been blessed with good weather during the march into Assyria, and even now no rain fell to trouble us. Still, as we closed in, multitudes of

lightning spikes appeared overhead, and the sound of deep rumbling filled the heavens above.

One of my heavily armed commoners, hardly older than seventeen, approached my horse as this display raged on, saying that there seemed to be a war in heaven to match our own on earth. “I think so, too,” I assured him, “and the gods who protect us are carrying the day.”

Delay Showing the Extent of Your Strength

The Assyrians and their allies erected defensive positions according to their custom, creating trenches and fortified points. The enemy king thought that the Median cavalry would be thrown into confusion by such obstacles, and the vast numbers at his command finished the digging quickly.

Once protected by their defenses, the Assyrians thought they’d gained the advantage of fighting at whatever moment they deemed best. Though they’d completely surrounded their position with a trench, they remained perfectly visible to us Persians and Medes. Developing a better plan, I used all the cover I could find, screening my army behind villages and hills in the knowledge that a hostile force rattles the enemy’s courage if it suddenly appears out of nowhere.

On the next day the troops of the king of Assyria and his ally King Croesus of Lydia remained behind their trenches. Syazarees and I stealthily drew up our men, prepared to fight if the enemy advanced.

When it was plain that the enemy wouldn’t come forth that day, Syazarees summoned me—along with his own staff—to say, “I think, gentlemen, that we ought to march up to their breastworks and challenge them. If we do,” he added, “and they refuse to fight, it’ll increase the confidence of our own men, and the sight of our boldness will add to the enemy’s fears.”

Here at last my uncle was trying to show decisiveness, initiative, and clarity of mind. In spite of myself, the great solemnity of the moment touched my heart. I could palpably feel the experience and worth of the older generals that Syazarees had gathered into council. They were a grand sight in their burnished armor and their colorful robes.

Nip Ill-Advised Plans in the Bud

Yet even in this company I felt the need to protest loudly. I exclaimed, “In the name of heaven, Syazarees, let’s think of a better plan! That open style of advance would show them the size of our army and spoil the element of surprise. Secure in their trenches, they’d watch us with smiles on their faces, and when we retired without doing them any harm, they’d laugh at our smaller numbers. Then, the next morning, they’d come out with towering

confidence.”

Establishing eye contact with the Median generals one after the other—but avoiding the face of my uncle—I added in a calmer voice, “As things now stand, the enemy knows we’re here, but they haven’t actually seen us. They’re wondering why we’re staying out of sight, and they’re frustrated because they can’t be sure what we’re up to. We ought to remain invisible until they come out, and in that moment, we ought to fall on them like lions.”

So I spoke. Persuaded at once, Syazarees and the other commanders agreed to wait. I quickly left, not wanting to appear eager to contradict my uncle again.

In the evening we Persians and Medes took our meals and posted our pickets and lit watch fires in front of our outposts. Then we turned to rest. I slept in peace, sensing that we were safe from any enemy action during the night.

Early the next morning I awoke feeling serene, settled a garland on my brow, and went out to offer sacrifice, sending word to all the peers of Persia to join me, wearing similar garlands on their heads. When the rite was over, I called them together and said, “Gentlemen, the soothsayers have discovered—and I agree—that the gods have announced by signs in our sacrificial victims that the battle will begin today. What is more, the gods have promised us victory!”

Of course, I knew that God doesn’t always deliver what the priests declare, but everyone appreciated the ritual importance of the omens. The great thing was to give my men confidence, and what better way than to ground their optimism in a sense of divine approval. For my part, I trusted God to guide my fate to greatness, whatever forecasts the priests developed.

Avoid Disrupting Operations, but Let Your Voice Be Heard

The battle was indeed at hand. Before the sun was long up, the Assyrians drew up in battle array. It was the Assyrian king himself who marshaled his troops, encouraging them from his place on the royal chariot.

At about the same moment Syazarees was sending me word to begin my attack. “Though there aren’t many of the enemy outside their trenches yet,” wrote my uncle, “by the time we’ve advanced there’ll be plenty of them to fight with. Don’t wait until they outnumber us, Cyrus! Charge at once!”

As the critical hour approached, I had grown calmer and calmer, but my uncle’s message revealed that he wasn’t blessed with the same composure. To my mind, there seemed to be more panic than philosophy in his frenzied call to action.

I told the messenger to answer my uncle as follows, “Unless we attack more than half the enemy’s strength, they’re sure to say that we were afraid of

their full force, and they won't feel beaten. We'll have to meet them another day when they're likely to fight according to a better plan than the one they're using now."

So the messenger took my reply back to Syazarees. Meanwhile my commander Kryzantos, who never wore a helmet into battle, rode up to my side. He was accompanied by several Persian officers of lesser rank who had custody of three Assyrian deserters. I questioned the fugitives about the enemy's activities, and they said the Assyrians were marching out in force.

Well-Trained Personnel Always Come Through in a Pinch

Kryzantos then turned to me and said, "What do you think of summoning our men once more, while there's still time, so they can enter battle with your words still ringing in their ears?"

Perceiving that Kryzantos seemed unsure of his own suggestion, I answered, "No words, no matter how eloquent, can suddenly turn cowards into brave men, or make good archers out of bad, or even teach men to use their arms and legs."

"But," insisted Kryzantos, "couldn't you make our brave men braver still?"

I must have seemed a little heedless as I answered, "Can the air from my own lungs fill my men with martial spirit at this point? I've drilled fighting prowess into our army for weeks on end now, Kryzantos, and today our troops are so eager for victory that nothing will diminish their courage. Set your mind at ease. My heart has long been one with my army's, and I know they'll prevail on this day that Almighty God has given us. Don't be afraid for the men, but lead them forward with confidence. They'll see me in the first rank, Kryzantos, the only place where a true commander can feel at home during a battle."

While we were speaking, my royal uncle sent another message that ordered me to advance immediately against the enemy. I sent back word to say, "King Syazarees, there still aren't as many of their warriors in the field as there should be, but, according to your orders, I'll advance at once."

With a prayer to God, I dismounted from my horse and took my helmet, sword, and shield from my armor bearer. Steeling myself, I led my troops into battle on foot.

Go Forward with Spirit and Faith to Carry the Day

Some sort of indefinable spiritual energy, crackling with triumph, was in the air. I could actually feel how one in spirit were my God, my army, and myself. It was as though some mystical bond had descended from above.

Seeing that my men were following in uncannily perfect order, I quickened the pace. The army responded steadily, swiftly, joyously—disciplined and hardened by their long training—every man in the front a leader, and all of us alive as never before. Holding back nothing, my men were ready to act on the advice that I had so often repeated: It is always safest to meet the enemy at close quarters.

While we were still out of danger from the enemy's projectiles, I sent the war cry along the lines, "God our help and God our leader!" As soon as the cry returned to me as a roaring echo, I sounded the first notes of our battle hymn, the paean. The men took up the paean devoutly, in one mighty chorus. There's an excellent reason for this custom: In times of crisis, those who open their mouths to honor the gods are less fearful of the enemy.

When the great heaving chant was over, the peers of Persia came forward side by side to lead. They were a band of gallant comrades, radiant, high-bred, and disciplined. They called to each other by name and shouted, "Forward, friends! Forward, gallant gentlemen!"

The rear ranks heard the call and sent back a ringing cheer, bidding the vanguard to lead on. My entire army was brimming with courage and zeal, with hardihood and self-control. We all began to clang our swords on our shields as though we were intent on deafening the enemy before we destroyed him.

As we crashed down upon the Assyrian front line, their charioteers lost heart and drove back to their own main body. The Assyrian archers, javelin throwers, and slingers were so rattled that they launched their projectiles before we came within range.

Stepping disdainfully over the spent arrows and javelins and stones, I called to my men. "Forward now, bravest of the brave! Show me how quickly you can close with the enemy!"

Stout Hearts Lead from the Front, Not the Rear

The men caught the word and passed it on. In our passion and eagerness for the fray, some of us leaders broke into a run, and the entire formation followed at our heels.

I myself was the first to abandon the regular march and dash forward at the head of the army, shouting, "Brave men to the front! Who follows me? Who lays the first Assyrian low?" The men behind took up the shout till it sounded across the field with tremendous power.

We Persians closed with such determination that the enemy lacked the courage to hold their ground. Turning in panic, they fled to their entrenchments. We swept on, felling the enemy warriors as they tried to crowd in at their own fortified gates.

In the rout, most of the enemy's chariots were carried into the ditch that

had been dug for their army's protection. Shouting at the top of their lungs, my men sprang down after the charioteers and cut their lives short with thrusts of steel.

The Median cavalry, seeing how matters stood, charged the Assyrian cavalry, who swerved and broke before them. Somewhere on that field, the Assyrian king perished as a whirling Median sword mixed his entrails into mush. Meanwhile the Assyrians within the trenches stood helplessly upon the breastworks, lacking enough presence of mind to draw bow or fling spear against us Persians and Medes. They were dazed by dread and undone by everything that met their eyes and ears.

Fighting our way forward in a fury among the disoriented enemy, we cut through to the gates of their fortifications. As the word of our surge spread, the Assyrians and their allies fled from the breastworks. The women, seeing the rout in the camp, began to wail and lament, running here and there in senseless chaos. Richly dressed maidens jostled against mothers with children in their arms. All alike rent their garments and tore their cheeks with their nails, crying to the cowards who were deserting them, "Don't leave us! Save your children and wives first!"

This show of desperation inspired some of the Assyrian nobles to gather their bravest men and push us back from the gates, fighting on the breastworks themselves while urging all their troops to make a stand. Seeing how the situation was developing, I feared that a handful of my Persians might force their way into the camp and be overwhelmed by the enemy's greater numbers, so I gave the order to fall back out of range.

Both my nobles and my commoners displayed their perfect discipline, instantly obeying the order and passing it on without hesitation. When they had all withdrawn, they halted and reformed their ranks, every man knowing exactly where he ought to be.

BOOK V

SWELLING THE RANKS

As the sun passed across the afternoon sky, I waited with my troops, ready to fight again if our enemies renewed their attack. Since the Assyrian camp remained quiet, toward evening I led my army away for the night.

I had guards posted and scouts sent forward. Then I gathered my warriors around me and spoke to them as follows, “Men of Persia, for our salvation and our victory I first thank the gods with all my soul. Then I offer my thanks to you. Your courage—the courage of every last man—has made this a glorious day. When my officers tell me how each of you performed during the fighting, I’ll give each man his due.”

Laud Your Heroes as Figures to Emulate

My promise of largess inspired thunderous cheers from the men. When I could be heard again, I added, “There’s one man I don’t need to hear about from anyone else—your general Kryzantos. He fought next to me in the fray and I witnessed his heroism myself. When I gave the order to retreat, he’d just started to raise his sword to strike down another of the enemy. The instant he heard my voice, he immediately dropped his arm and did my bidding. He passed the command to retreat down the line, and he led his division out of range before the enemy could let fly with one more arrow or javelin. He brought himself and his people away in perfect safety because he knows how to obey.”

Even the most distant soldiers were able to catch my every word, for my voice sounded stronger than ever before. Despite their mood—a mix of giddy excitement and deep fatigue—the soldiers, I perceived, would long remember what I had to say.

“Inevitably,” I continued, “some of you are wounded, and I can see that many of you have joined us here despite your wounds. I applaud your greatness of spirit. When I hear about the deeds that left you wounded, I’ll know just how much to praise and reward you. However, let me tell you right now how I’m going to reward Kryzantos for being a true soldier—for being a soldier who’s able to lead because he’s able to obey. Henceforth he’ll command a thousand troops. If he serves me as well in the future as he served me today, he can expect to rise higher still.”

The army cheered and applauded Kryzantos for his good service and good

fortune.

Motivate Your People by Recognizing Merit

“Remember,” I broke in to say, “great opportunities await everyone in this army who’s determined to succeed. Whatever your rank, your virtues are bound to be recognized. Only excel and, as our conquests continue, you’ll rise ever higher.”

I then enjoined the men never to forget the lesson of the day’s encounter. “Judge for yourselves,” I said, “whether it’s cowardice or courage that saves a man in war. Judge whether fighters or shirkers have the better chance to survive. The enemy ran away and died, while we advanced to victory. Let this knowledge make you braver and better still. Now you can rest peacefully, proud to have done your duty with courage and honor. Go and eat and sing the paean once more as you pour out libations to the gods.”

So saying, I mounted my horse and galloped off to Syazarees’s camp, where the king and I rejoiced together as victors. Diplomatically, he withheld any mention of our conflicting perceptions before the battle; undiplomatically, he seemed reluctant to give my Persians sufficient credit for their part in the triumph.

Since Syazarees offered me little hospitality, I rode back to my own army. We finished the evening meal, and I made sure enough guards were posted. After I prayed for a speedy return to health for my wounded, I lay down with sleep as my gentle companion.

Meanwhile the Assyrians, learning that their king and dozens of their nobles were dead, had fallen into despair, and many of them deserted during the night. Fear then crept over the Lydian king Croesus and the other enemy leaders who were still alive, and they abandoned their fortified encampment under cover of darkness.

Exploit One Victory by Rapidly Pursuing the Next

By the time day broke, the enemy was gone. Without further ado I led my men into the abandoned entrenchments, where we found that a vast amount of supplies had been left behind: Herds of sheep, goats, and cattle, and long rows of wagons laden with everything an army needs. Syazarees soon came up with his army, so both his Medes and my Persians chose their breakfast from among the spoils.

When the meal was over, I summoned my senior officers and said to them, “We’ve enjoyed the first fruits of the harvest, but now the hour has come to move on. The enemy may have slipped away, but is it likely that such soldiers—too frightened even to shelter in these entrenchments—will dare to face us

on open ground? Yesterday we overthrew the army that camped here, killing its best and bravest, and shattering the confidence of the survivors.”

A brigadier interrupted me to cry out, “Then why not pursue them at once?”

“Because we Persians still don’t have horses!” I reminded him. “The most dangerous of our remaining enemies—the ones most important to seize or slay—are mounted on steeds that can sweep past us like the wind. With the help of God we can put them to flight, but we can’t overtake them.”

“Syazarees has more horsemen than he knows how to use,” Kryzantos pointed out. “Why not lay the matter before him?”

I paused before deciding what to do next. “If I go before my uncle, you must all go with me. I want Syazarees to see for himself that every one of us wants to pursue the enemy.”

Use Your Own People to Plead Your Cause

So my high command and I went together to the tent of my uncle. We quickly realized that we were unwelcome there, for the king and his nobles had been toasting each other with large goblets of wine, and we were interfering with their celebrations. Though I stood nearer to my uncle than did any of my Persian officers, I remained mostly silent, letting my generals speak to him about their resolve to overtake the retreating enemy.

Syazarees answered my officers with words of guile. “My good nephew and my sweet Persian allies, I thank you for coming here, but I’m surprised by your request. Your nobles are known to be temperate in their desires, and I myself believe that the kind of victory we’ve won today calls for great steadiness of mind. If we guard our present good fortune we’ll live to grow old in peace, but if we’re too eager for even greater victories, the gods may make us losers in the end.”

My uncle, I thought, is all wine and wind. I had never heard a counsel of cowardice—for that is surely what it was—put forward with so little shame.

Taking to his throne, Syazarees repeated a proverb about foolish mariners who constantly sail their trading ships in pursuit of greater wealth—until one day the deep sea swallows their lives as well as their fortunes.

“Many triumphant warriors have completely lost their first victory by being too greedy for a second,” my uncle said. “Yesterday we fought and conquered only part of the enemy. The great mass had no chance to join in the battle. If we don’t force them to fight now, they’ll steal away in fear. If we pursue them, they might attack us with the terrible energy of trapped men. Finally,” Syazarees added, “I have no great wish to distract my Medes from their celebrations or drive them out to face further dangers. They’re in no mood for that now.”

Counter Demoralizing Words with Reasoned Argument

Listening to the king, my officers quickly lost their air of confidence, and I noted one more reason to supplant Syazarees as commander-in-chief of the army: He could demoralize ambitious troops as rapidly and thoroughly as any man alive. Though I'd hoped to keep a low profile throughout this encounter, I now felt compelled to confront my uncle directly.

"My officers aren't asking you, King Syazarees, to pressure any of your Medes." I observed, "but why not offer your men the chance to join with us Persians in our pursuit? Maybe we'll come back with something for everyone to enjoy. Remember," I added, "how far we Persians journeyed to help you. Isn't it fair that you should do us a favor in return? I'm afraid my men will start to complain if we stand around here, gaping at all the plunder that you've gathered for yourselves."

At that Syazarees reluctantly answered, "I suppose that...Well, if any of my horsemen want to follow you of their own free will, I give you my permission to take them along."

For a moment I wondered whether I could trust my ears. Had any king ever surrendered so much power so heedlessly? Already deep in his cups, my uncle was oblivious to the gravity of the moment, which I aimed to take full advantage of.

"Then give me one of your trusted men to confirm your permission," I requested.

"Anyone you like," my uncle answered shortly. "And then stop interrupting our celebration!"

Let Your Special Admirers Work in Your Behalf

Among the officers present was a Mede named Rspas who claimed kinship with me; years before, as boys, we two had hunted together in my grandfather's kingdom. I pointed to my cousin and said, "That man will do for me."

"Fine," Syazarees replied. Turning to the officer, the king said, "Rspas, tell your comrades that anyone who volunteers for service with the Persians is welcome to follow Cyrus."

I bowed to the king and came away with my chosen man. When we were outside I asked, "Will you do your best to bring other Median warriors to my side, cousin?"

"By the gods," cried Rspas, "I will—until you have plenty of proof of my devotion to you! You, Cyrus, are a man who aims to do great things. Unfortunately, your decisive ways have gone a little out of style among us Medes."

“It was different in Media in my grandfather’s day,” I said. “But now you must hurry to your comrades. Please, cousin, get your cavalrymen to join me before they’re too drunk to be of any use.”

Thereupon Rspas went to the Median troopers and passionately called for recruits, adding that he, for one, would never forsake me. He called me the best of men—a new hero whose ancestors sprang from the Father God himself.

As my cousin was winning recruits, two mounted ambassadors arrived from the Hyrcanians. Conquered years ago by the Assyrians, the Hyrcanians had never been comfortable with their status as subjects. Now their Assyrian masters had ordered them to serve as the rearguard during the retreat. A simple question had occurred to them when they received their new orders: Why should Hyrcanians bear the brunt of any renewed attack by the Persians and Medes?

Be Quick to Exploit New Alliances

Like so many of the tribes in ancient Asia, the Hyrcanians took their entire households with them on campaign. Thus the men of the tribe had all the more reason to embrace us as victors. Above all, they wanted to know if abandoning their old masters and embracing us Persians would save their families.

Their ambassadors to me were hopeful but apprehensive. Here, they understood, was a new power that might reward them well for switching sides. They told me why they despised the Assyrians and offered to become my loyal allies. Knowing all they knew, these Hyrcanians, as they claimed, could show me the best way to attack the retreating enemy army.

“Do you think,” I asked, “that we can overtake the Assyrians before they reach their fortresses?”

“Oh, yes, you can catch them,” the ambassadors assured me, “if you assemble and move out soon. The Assyrians travel slowly because of their great numbers and their long train of wagons. Since they didn’t sleep last night, they made little progress today, and they’re already encamped for the evening.”

“Can you give us any guarantee,” I wondered aloud, “that what you say is true?”

“We’ll give you hostages from among our own people,” the first ambassador offered. “We’ll ride off at once and bring some of our foremost countrymen back to you this very night. Then you can call the gods to witness and give us the pledge of your right hand. We, in our turn, will convince our people of your good faith.”

Without the slightest hesitation I promised that, if the Hyrcanians kept their word, I would treat them as my true friends—on a par with my Persians and

the Medes. But I would not allow the two Hyrcanian ambassadors to go off and bring hostages back to me; that would consume far too much time, and might even alert the Assyrians to their defection.

Still a relatively modest force, my entire army was delighted that the Hyrcanians had joined us of their own free will. As for myself, I would always hold a special place in my heart for these tribesmen. They had come to offer their friendship when I was isolated and in desperate need of allies, and their unexpected arrival struck me as another sign that I was born to fulfill my ambitions.

Understand the Motivations of Your Followers

Thus I led out the army while Syazarees and his generals were deep in their cups. This was my first command of a force that was fully equipped with cavalry, and, though much of my strength was on loan from Syazarees, I was now more powerful than ever before. My Persians, of course, were with me to a man, and Tigranes, a prince of the Armenians, was there with a contingent of his own countrymen.

The Medians volunteered in great numbers. Some had been my casual friends in boyhood, while others had hunted with me long ago and approved of my character. Most of the Medes, however, were there to share in the wealth of a rising star, hoping to be well rewarded for breaking off their initial celebrations in favor of following me.

No one seemed as aware as I that we were undertaking a very risky piece of business. I wanted no time to be wasted on securing a train of provisions, for I planned for us to live at the expense of the retreating Assyrians. Guaranteeing the men a meal would be like encouraging them to relax.

I hadn't forgotten that an army marches on its stomach, but this particular army would be more useful to me if it could march for a time on its legs alone. My plans made it impossible for my men to survive as anything but a conquering force.

The army followed me with the optimism that I considered essential to success. I'd have hesitated to lead them out to battle if they hadn't been so eager to obey my orders. Surely no great action should be undertaken without first preparing your charges to cherish your leadership.

Keep Your Communications Clear and Open

As soon as we were well afield, I galloped back to the Median cavalry and thanked them for coming (expressions of gratitude are always in order), saying also that I hoped to reward their initiative. I ended by explaining that my Persian infantry would march immediately in front of them. They were to

send to me for further orders every time the column came to a halt.

At my behest the Hyrcanians led the way. At first they exclaimed, “What, Highness? Aren’t you going to let us bring out hostages for you? Then you could start the march with human pledges of our true faith.”

I answered, “If I’m not mistaken, we already hold your pledges—just as you hold ours. They’re in our right hands, the very hands you shook to confirm our new alliance. If you’re true to us, we can help you begin your new lives with a brilliant success. Even if you act with treachery, we won’t be at your mercy, for we know our strength is greater than your own.”

“Oh, you must not believe, Highness, that we underestimate your forces,” said the second ambassador. “Please put all your confidence in our desire to serve you loyally.”

“I believe you’ll be true, and I need no hostages to bolster my belief,” I said. “But let’s be sure that everything gets off to a good start. Just as soon as you see your own folk in the Assyrian rear, point them out to us, so we can spare their lives.”

When the Hyrcanians heard my words, they led the way as ordered. I was glad to have won their confidence, for it helped them feel that the Assyrians—together with the Lydians of King Croesus—were doomed to defeat.

Feeling assured of victory, the Hyrcanians harbored only one great fear: That I might eventually change my feelings toward them, reckoning them as nothing more than dust on the balance. They had surprisingly little sense of how crucial to victory I felt their presence to be, and I reassured them whenever I was able.

As night closed in on our march, everyone’s attention turned to the strange lights that suddenly appeared in the heavens. The lights seemed distant at one moment and near the next. As the army watched, the lights started to cross the starry field from east to west like a great bird with a glowing plumage of red and green.

“As we travel across all earth, these lights from God search all heaven,” was my interpretation of the mystery. Accepting my words as true, the army’s courage swelled with each succeeding mile.

Gather Intelligence from Those on the Scene

The men covered many miles through the night and, in the half-light of morning, we drew close to the Hyrcanian rearguard. The two ambassadors were quick to tell me when they spotted their kinsmen.

Thereupon I sent one of the two men forward, bidding all the Hyrcanians to come out on their horses at once with their right hands empty and extended as proof of their friendship. I also dispatched one of my own officers to tell them in their own language, “If you come in peace, we’ll greet you in peace.”

I halted my army to watch what the Hyrcanians would do. Tigranes the

Armenian and the Median officers came forward to ask for new orders. I explained that the foreign troops nearest them were no longer enemies but allies. “At least they’re our friends if they come out as ordered,” I said. “When they show themselves harmless, you must welcome them, taking their hands and putting them at ease.”

When the rest of the Hyrcanians heard my offer of alliance, they were overjoyed. They sprang onto their steeds and galloped up to me and my officers, holding out their right arms as I had bidden.

“Sons of Hyrcania,” I addressed them, “we’ve shown our trust in you already, and you must trust us in return. Now tell me, how far is it from here to the main body of the Assyrian army?”

“About three miles,” I was told.

“Forward then, my men,” I said, “Persians, Medes, Armenians, and Hyrcanians together! As you Hyrcanians hear, I already call you friends and comrades. And at this moment I want to offer everyone a friendly warning.”

I paused, waiting for a deeper quiet to descend. Then I said, “Even after suffering a harsh defeat, the force that lies out ahead of us has far greater numbers than our own. If our hands falter or our courage fails now, we’ll meet with disaster; but if we carry the charge home, you’ll see the enemy caught like a pack of cowards—some of them on their knees, others in full flight, and the rest doubled up with terror. Don’t give them enough time to arrange a solid defense. We’ve got to appear against them like an uncontrollable nightmare of spears and battle-axes and flashing swords!”

My pride swelled as the men started to cheer, but I was forced to call for silence. “Save your voices for the battle cry,” I ordered. “If you use them now, you’ll reveal our presence.”

Don’t Give Way to a Lust for Plunder

Turning to our new allies again, I said through an interpreter, “You Hyrcanians will go forward in front of us. We’ll use you as a screen, staying hidden behind you for as long as possible. I advise the officers and older men among you to ride in close order, so that your ranks won’t be broken by the foe. Let your younger men pursue and destroy our enemies. And when we conquer,” I added, “we must not give way to a lust for plunder until the enemy is completely scattered. The man who’s too quick to plunder is no longer a man. He turns himself into a beast of burden and ought to be treated like a traitor.”

No Hyrcanian raised his voice to protest that I was putting his fellows in the most dangerous position, or that I was depriving them of their natural right to pillage.

“Nothing,” I added, “works like victory. The victor seizes everything—manpower, wealth, and territory. But the victory must be truly secure before

its fruits can be safely harvested.” Then I said, “At the end of the day, break off the pursuit and rejoin me while it’s still daylight, for when darkness falls we won’t admit a soul within our lines.”

At that point I sent my ranking officers back to their appointed stations. The advance began again with the Hyrcanians leading off. I held the center myself, marching with my Persians, and the Median cavalry was drawn up on either flank.

BOOK VI

SPURS TO SPEED

As the light grew in the east, the enemy caught sight of us for the first time. Some simply stared at what was happening. Others, beginning to realize the unearthly truth, screamed at each other, unfastened the horses from the carriages, and snatched up an armload of plunder to carry away on horseback.

There were enemy soldiers who tried to protect the women by hurrying them into carriages—but there were also rogues who knocked the women down and seized their jewelry. By far the greatest number of the enemy ran from us in headlong flight.

Since the weather was hot and dusty, the Lydian king Croesus had sent his own women ahead the evening before, to let them travel in the comfort of the cool night air. Croesus himself had followed them with his cavalry as an escort, and the Lord of Phrygia had done the same. These two great monarchs, when they learned what was happening from the panic-stricken fugitives who overtook them, fled for their lives with the masses. The kings of Cappadocia and Arabia, on the other hand, stood their ground—only to be cut down by the Hyrcanians.

Overconfidence Has Been the Undoing of Many

The largest number of those who died were Assyrians. Despite their previous defeat, they had still felt secure in their own country, so they'd taken few precautions on the march. Now hundreds of them fell victim to the Hyrcanian and Median horsemen, who were out ahead, operating far beyond my personal control.

When I myself encountered enemy soldiers, I sent a messenger to reason with them, asking their horsemen and javelin throwers and archers to come out on foot with their weapons tied in bundles, ready to hand over to us.

The enemy soldiers stared for a long moment at the cordon of Persian troops who stood there with their swords drawn. Then they began to bring out their weapons and fling them down. I had the whole pile burnt before their eyes, for the sight dramatized the full extent of their defeat.

Now, I believed, my warriors had come of age. Our reputation for invincibility would precede us wherever we went, but I would still need to increase our numbers, even as the enemy's dwindled.

Every army employs overseers who guarantee that hot food is ready and

bedding is available when battle-weary soldiers return from the fray. I knew that such enemy noncombatants had been left behind in the conquered camp. Not forgetting that my troops had marched through the night and fought through the day without food or drink, I sent out a proclamation for all the enemy stewards to present themselves immediately.

Give Functionaries an Incentive to Join Your Cause

Once they were standing before me, I ordered the stewards who possessed more than two months' rations to sit down on the ground. Then those who had provisions for one month were told to be seated. At that point very few were left standing. Obviously, the day's work had netted us a huge amount of provisions, and I could easily afford to be openhanded.

Allow me to pause and emphasize this general rule: Success always calls for greater generosity—though most people, lost in the darkness of their own egos, treat it as an occasion for greater greed.

I spoke to the stewards as follows, "Gentlemen, if you'd like us to treat you with the respect you deserve, you'll have to provide us with twice as much meat and drink as you did for your defeated masters. You've already seen that my own soldiers are worn out, and my allies will soon be returning in a state of exhaustion. All my men are hoping for an abundance of food and refreshments, and your task is to give them everything they need for a feast of celebration. Truly, it's in your own interest to treat my soldiers and allies to a welcome they'll never forget."

At my words the stewards shouted aloud that they were eager to outdo themselves. Without further encouragement they hurried off and set to work.

I then summoned my officers and said to them,

"Friends, since our allies are still in the field, we can choose the tastiest dishes and the most expensive wines. But the delight that even the best meal could bring us won't benefit us half as much as pleasing our allies first. It would be dishonorable to forget those men who are still out there fighting for us, pursuing our foes and destroying whoever resists. If we choose this moment to indulge ourselves, we'll miss a great opportunity to strengthen our ties of brotherhood."

Some voices moaned in complaint, but I continued as though I'd heard nothing. "We're still far from reaching our goals. Out there are enemies in numbers that are ten times our own. We need to stay on our guard against those who are still at large. As for the ones who have already surrendered, we need to keep them from escaping, or we'll be deprived of all the servants and allies that we're going to need. Our mounted friends from Media are still afield, and it's time to wonder what they'll do when they return. Will they stay with us—or will they return to Syzarees?"

Earn Loyalty by Rewarding Your Critical Allies First

I paused to let the question sink in. After another moment I added, “This camp contains vast treasures and, if we really wanted to, we could decide to pick and choose for ourselves, but let’s resist this temptation, too. We can gain a fortune in that precious stuff called loyalty by being generous to our allies. Indeed, I’ll go further and say that we ought to leave the distribution of the spoils to the Medes, the Hyrcanians, and the Armenians. Let’s count it a blessing in disguise if they give us the smaller share, for then they’ll be all the more willing to stay with us and be our comrades.”

By the looks on their faces, many of my officers were reacting to my counsels of generosity with misgivings. This came as no surprise. Even my senior commanders could be slow to think ahead, and this wasn’t their hour of maximum clarity.

“Loosing our grip on these little treasures now,” I continued, “will bring us far greater rewards tomorrow. Wasn’t it for this very reason that we were trained in youth to curb our selfish desires? Where, I ask, will we find a better opportunity for exercising our self-control?”

Hestifer rose to support me, saying, “Truly, Cyrus, greater wealth will come to us sooner if we don’t surrender to greed right now. As for me, I’ll let the thoughtless grumble. It’s your wisdom that inspires me.”

So spoke Hestifer, and the rest also approved of what I had to say. I rejoiced openly, congratulating my men on their generosity and restraint.

Defeat the Foeman Known as Envy

Before long the Medes and Hyrcanians started to return on their sweating, slaving horses. Some of them had seized the enemy supply wagons, which were now being driven into camp. Others among the allied horsemen had captured the elegantly appointed wagons that carried the wives and concubines of the Assyrian noblemen. (In my era many warriors would take their most beloved women on campaign, saying that they fought better in the presence of their families. The women accepted this compliment with mixed feelings.)

When I saw the evidence of the feats that the Medes and Hyrcanians had performed, I nearly reproached myself. My allies had risen to the occasion. They’d shown their strength and won their prizes, while my Persians and I, without a large force of cavalry, had been left behind like stragglers. All we could do was watch the victors riding home, driving their spoils before them. Then they’d dash off again in search of more plunder.

“No work like this!”

“Get your boys some horses, Prince Cyrus!”

Thus the jovial Medes and Hyrcanians called to me as they galloped away.

I waved and laughed after them while my Persians dutifully catalogued the booty of our allies, keeping it all in good order.

After my sudden pang of envy, I quickly reminded myself that collecting booty was not an end in itself, but only a means for building my empire. Riches would be of little use to us now—except as a means of winning new friends. For a long time we Persians would be continually on the move, and the more possessions we collected, the slower our movements would be. My desire was to be the most benignly powerful man alive—not the richest.

Effect a Revolution in Speed of Movement

What I really needed to do was to finish the job of equipping my army anew, and what we needed most was mobility—the mobility that could only be provided by horses. I might get away with using Syazarees’s cavalry for the indefinite future, but my heart’s desire was to see my Persians comfortable and commanding astride their own mounts.

Even now, I knew, most of my men were chiefly interested in getting rich and returning to Persia. Because I had higher hopes for their futures, I would have to keep my own counsel. My plan, then, was to use their desire for wealth as a means of revolutionizing our military traditions with the adoption of cavalry. This change would have to be finessed.

Again I summoned my officers and spoke as follows, “My noble friends, you can see that wealth would descend from us to every Persian in our land if the spoils displayed before us now were ours to keep. What I can’t imagine is how we’re ever going to win such prizes for ourselves without horses of our own.”

My officers nodded in approval as I continued. “Consider the facts. We Persians have the courage, the skills, and the heavy weapons to rout our enemies at close quarters, but when we rout them, their horsemen and all their lightly armed foot soldiers escape. After they regroup, the enemy is far less fearful of dashing up and harrying us. They realize that, under our burden of armor and heavy weapons, we’ll pursue them with all the speed of stumps in an orchard. For the time being, things must be as they are, but suppose we possessed as many riders as our friends? Then we’d deal with the enemy as quickly as our allies do.”

I then said that it would make all the difference in the world if we could get a large body of Persians mounted and trained to fight as cavalry. “Where are we to get the horses?” I asked hypothetically. “We’d have them already if our own homeland wasn’t so rocky and mountainous and hostile to horses’ hooves. Suppose we decide to raise the force ourselves. We now have hundreds of captured horses in this camp, with their bridles and all their gear. Besides these, we have all the equipment necessary for a mounted force—

breastplates and light spears to be flung or wielded at close quarters.”

“Hear, hear,” the officers started to shout in approval.

Convince Your People of the Benefits of Change

“Yes!” I shouted back. “But some will say that Persians don’t have the skills to become good horsemen. Well, I’m a Persian and a good horseman, and so are you, my officers. Do we look unsteady in the saddle? I’ll grant that most of the commoners don’t possess the skills of horsemen at the moment, but every mounted warrior had to start riding at some point.”

I paused, pretending to hear a voice of dissent. “Ah, but here’s an objection! We now hear that our allies learned to ride when they were boys!”

Looking back out at my officers, I said, “All right, but are boys better at learning to ride than grown men? Who’s better at a heavy physical task, a man or a boy? Since our men already know how to use the sword and the bow and the javelin on their own two feet, they’ll soon learn to use them in the saddle as well. Every one of them will be eager to give their feet a rest and sit astride a horse. As for speed, there’s no comparison.”

The officers seemed enchanted by my vision. “Now,” I continued, “let’s see if there are any problems in all this. Is there anyone who doubts the wisdom of my plan?”

One of the young officers immediately spoke up. “What if the commoners are called upon to fight when they’re still saddlesore and unsteady on their horses? At that point they’d probably feel like they’re neither infantry nor cavalry. Soldiers like that could end up dead on the ground!”

“Such a situation might seem possible,” I conceded. “They’ll certainly be sore for a few days, and you can’t expect the men to fight like centaurs early on. Still, there’s an answer to this problem. Won’t the men be able to turn into infantry again at a moment’s notice? Learning to ride won’t make them forget the arts of fighting on foot.”

The Eloquence of Others May Be as Effective as Your Own

Another young officer rose to support me, saying: “When I’m hunting on foot, I always feel lucky if I can get close enough to let an arrow or a javelin fly before my prey runs away; but when I hunt on horseback, I can gallop right up to my prey before I strike. So consider the implications. On the battlefield my horse will carry me right up to the enemy, and sometimes the power of my horse alone will overthrow him.”

Happily, the young officer was doing my work for me. “As it is now,” he continued, “our infantrymen have only two eyes and two ears, but when

they're mounted they'll watch and listen with four of each. A horse can see and hear things before a man can, and a horse can give its rider a warning with its body language."

I nodded enthusiastically as he added, "I think we should make it a rule from this day forward to mock any Persian who disgraces himself by trudging along on foot."

Everyone instantly assented, and a new custom was long retained in my homeland: No Persian with any pretensions to gentility would dismount unless he had a compelling reason to do so.

By the early afternoon the Median and Hyrcanian troopers came galloping home, bringing in men as well as horses, for they had spared the lives of everyone who surrendered their arms. I listened to their stories with a broad smile and praised them for their work. "I can see for myself," I said, "that you've done gallant deeds. You've grown even taller in the saddle, and your flashing eyes inspire awe in the rest of us."

Then I made them tell me how far they'd ventured out. They said "for miles and miles," and they'd found the whole country inhabited—full of sheep, goats, cattle, and horses, and rich in corn and every good thing.

"It's up to us," I observed, "to make ourselves lords of the people who own all this—and to ensure they don't run away. A well-populated country is a rich possession, but a deserted land will soon become ... well, a desert!"

When Possible, Include Your Allies in Your Deliberations

I paused, as though pondering a dilemma. "I need you to help me make a decision about your prisoners," I told my mounted allies. "If we decide to free these men, we won't have to mount a guard over them. When they're free they can find their own food, and then we'll be able to take more valuable prisoners in their place. Since all the inhabitants of this country belong to us now, it will be to our benefit when they see these men come home alive and free. They'll gain confidence in our good intentions—and they'll decide to stay where they are and keep on working the land. That's my view, but if anyone sees a better course, let him point it out."

No one rose. All hearers approved the plan as proposed.

I summoned the prisoners and told them of their good fortune. "Good fellows, you've been saved because you followed orders and surrendered. Not only are you safe, but the army and I have decided not to enslave you. If you act honestly, nothing bad will ever befall you. You'll live in the same houses as you did before your old king died, and you'll farm the same land. You'll live with your wives and raise your children as before. You won't have to fight against us or anyone else."

The prisoners started murmuring among themselves, asking if the

translation of my words could possibly be true. “If anyone wrongs you,” I went on, “it’s we who will fight in your behalf. To prevent any future tyrant from making you serve in his army, you’ll have to hand over your arms to us. Those willing to obey can count on peace and the faithful fulfillment of all our promises. What’s more, if any one of you comes to us as a friend, giving us information and helping us in any way, we’ll treat him as a true ally. All this,” I added, “we want you to understand and repeat to your countrymen.”

Avoid Any Hint of Megalomania

The Assyrians’ last action as prisoners was to bow down before me. “You are free men now,” I reminded them. “Quickly now, rise and go on your way.”

After the prisoners had set off for their homes, I turned to the Hyrcanians and the Medes and the men of Armenia and said, “It’s high time, gentlemen, that all of us ate. Food and drink are prepared for you—the best we could find. Just send my Persians and myself, if you will, half the fresh bread. There’s plenty, I know, for all of us. You needn’t send us anything else.”

I then raised my voice, saying, “Let me remind all of you that, during the night, we Persians will guard the perimeter of the camp. I order you, as our allies, to keep watch within, making sure that the peace of the camp isn’t disturbed.”

Good Fortune Is No Excuse for Self-Indulgence

My allies washed away the bloodstains of battle and put on the new clothing that the stewards had laid out for them. Then they enjoyed the good food, and the horses had their provender too. Acting according to my instructions, the allies sent half the new bread to us Persians, but they kept all the relish and wine for themselves, for I’d told them that my troops had more than enough. Actually, I’d been referring to the relish of hunger and the cold water running down in torrents from the mountains. Even amid plenty, I didn’t want my men to lose their taste for austerity.

When darkness fell I sent out my Persians by fives and tens, ordering them to lie in ambush around the camp, so as to form a double guard—against attack from without and against deserters from within. By using this method, I ensured that anyone attempting to escape with stolen treasures under his cloak would be caught in the act.

Thus we Persians kept the camp in good order while the Medes and our other allies drank and feasted and made music and knew the full joy of victory.

BOOK VII

HEARTS JOINED AS ONE

My uncle Syazarees, the king of the Medes, drank himself drunk in the company of his favorite officers on the very night that I set forth with both our armies to overtake the retreating Assyrians. Hearing tumultuous laughter from the tents all around him, Syazarees assumed that the vast majority of his Medes must have ignored my plea and stayed in camp. In fact, the source of the uproar lay in the throats of the Median servants who, finding their masters gone, raided the wine casks and celebrated into the early hours.

When it was broad daylight and no one came to the king's tent except the guests of the previous evening, Syazarees realized that his camp was deserted, his Median cavalry far away. He went out to survey the abandoned tents and fumed with indignation against his own men—and more pointedly against me. How could a grand monarch like himself be left in the lurch? How could an upstart nephew succeed in recruiting his entire cavalry?

Cursing like a commoner, the king ordered one of his captains to take a hundred of his lifeguards and ride out at once to seek me and his horsemen. The officer was charged with delivering this message, “I, Syazarees, may have slept, but I never dreamed that Cyrus would act toward me with such ingratitude. Nor did I believe that my own subjects would ever desert me in this way. Now, whether Cyrus agrees or not, I command all my Medes to return and present themselves before me without delay.”

Anger Alienates Those Who Feel Its Heat

“How shall I find our men, Majesty?” asked the captain who was being ordered to act as a messenger.

“If you can't follow the trail of so many horsemen,” flared Syazarees, “how can you claim to be one of my officers?”

“I only asked,” returned the captain evenly, “because I know that some Hyrcanians revolted from the enemy and came here—and then went off with Cyrus to act as his guides.”

Hearing of this development, the king became all the more frantic to have his Medes return at once, adding some grossly offensive threats to their summons home.

Eager to escape the wrath of Syazarees, the captain set off with a hundred of the king's remaining cavalry. On the way his detachment took a wrong turn

that led them into an encounter with a band of defeated Assyrians. The captain captured these desperate men and forced them to cooperate. With the Assyrians' guidance, he spotted my watch fires about midnight. When the captain and his troopers tried to enter my camp, they were met by the pickets who, acting on my orders, wouldn't let them in until dawn.

With the first faint gleam of morning I summoned the Persian magi and invited them to choose the offerings due to the gods. While the priests were busy, I called my peers together and calmly talked to them about the spoils. Though these were great, I said, we Persians were too few to demand everything that ought to be ours.

I therefore proposed that some of the peers return to the homeland and ask my father Cambyses and the supreme council to send me a second army. Revealing more of my true intentions to the peers than ever before, I suggested that the speedy dispatch of this second army might allow Persia to win a whole new empire.

Choose a Worthy Representative

Now, at last, I'd become successful enough to assume that my country would be eager to invest more troops in my enterprise. Turning to a time-honored graybeard among the peers, I said, "As you're the eldest, I order you to return home and repeat my words, assuring my father and the elders that, when new troops arrive here, I'll be able to supply them myself. Tell my father of our great victories, and ask him what portion of the spoils I should send to the priests of the great temple. Then ask the elders how much of what we've won should be transferred to the national treasury. And, sir," I concluded, "you must get your baggage together, and take your entire company with you as an escort, but let me see you once more before you go."

After that I called all the Medes together. No sooner had they gathered than the captain sent by Syazarees presented himself. In the midst of the whole assembly he told of the king's anger against me and his threats against them. The Medes were ordered to ignore any further commands that I might try to issue. Their very lives, the captain said, depended on the speed with which they reappeared before Syazarees.

The Medes listened, silent in their inner turmoil. They could hardly disobey the summons of their lord—yet knowing how terrible his temper could be, not one of them was eager to face him again.

The moment was especially critical. My life's work might have collapsed if I hadn't immediately gathered my wits about me. I came to the Medes' rescue—and my own—by saying, "Men of Media, it's not surprising that Syazarees, who's ignorant of what we've accomplished, should tremble both for us and himself. But when he learns how many of the enemy have fallen and how many more have run away, his fears will vanish. Remember, I

became your leader only after I gained his permission to bring you out to finish the job. Therefore, his anger will subside when he learns of our success.”

The Medes embraced my advice with tremendous relief, for they had no desire to abandon their current quest until they’d enriched themselves as much as possible. For my part, I was gratified to see the faith they put in me as their protector. They’d had plenty of time to weigh my character against my uncle’s and, consciously or unconsciously, they’d decided there was nothing to fear as long as they obeyed me. They’d also realized that, with all of us standing together, Syazarees lacked the power to punish us.

Brevity Is the Soul of Command

Let my readers note that there’s no great need of long speeches at critical moments. Brevity is the soul of command. I’d used fewer than a hundred words to rescue my plans from a direct assault by my uncle. Too much talking suggests desperation on the part of the leader. Speak shortly, decisively, and to the point—and couch your desires in such natural logic that no can raise objections. Then move on.

After I dismissed the Medes, it was to my own Persians that I turned again. We were now facing a ruined army, I said. For the moment the Assyrians would neither offer battle nor render submission. Let’s intimidate them further, I suggested, by drawing up our formations in our grandest style.

“Maybe a little spectacle,” I offered, “will help convince them to surrender.” Indeed, why waste a single life in battle when a show of force can be used to disarm the enemy peacefully?

Taking the leader of the Hyrcanians aside, I said, “Son of Hyrcania, it’s clear that we share the same interests. The Assyrians are your foes as well as mine—only now they hate you even more bitterly than they hate me. That means we’ve got to be very careful about the fate of your people, so we need to work together all the more closely.”

The chieftain quickly agreed.

“Now, you’ve heard how my uncle has summoned the Median cavalry to return,” I added. “If they go, we’ll be left with nothing but our Persian infantry and your horsemen. I’m convinced the Median troopers will remain with us, but I want to do everything I can to make sure of it. So first we need to make the captain who’s serving as a messenger from Syazarees want to stay here himself. Do this: Find him quarters where he’ll have everything his heart desires, and I’ll offer him a warrior’s job that he’ll prefer to serving Syazarees. In the meantime, talk to him yourself and remind him that the whole world lies before us now.”

The chieftain obeyed, taking the Median captain away to his own quarters. Meanwhile, the graybeard that I’d chosen to return to my father had equipped

himself and his men for the journey. Just before he left, I ordered him to take a message to Syazarees on the way home. “I’ve already composed a letter for my uncle’s angry eyes,” I told the graybeard, “but I’d like to read you the message first and get your reaction.”

Words Must Always Be Used with Finesse

My wording was not without its subtleties. “Praise and greetings from Prince Cyrus to his Majestic Uncle Syazarees, King of the Medians. Have no fear that we’ve deserted you, sire. Nothing could be further from the truth, for even now we’re busy overcoming your enemies. Please don’t claim that we’ve put you in jeopardy by our departure. On the contrary, the farther we move ahead, the more security we will win for you, as we drive the enemy farther and farther from Media. Remember all I’ve done for you before you charge me with rebellion again. I’m the man who’s brought you new allies, and just now I’m sending for more troops from Persia. You, Majesty, will be given the opportunity to use those troops first.”

The graybeard observed that a new army of Persians would not be pleased to obey the orders of a man like Syazarees.

I smiled and commented, “Well, that’s unlikely to lead to any difficulties for us.” The graybeard chuckled as I went on reading. “In conclusion, I beg you not to take back with your left hand what you gave me with your right. Let me find more useful work for your horsemen. For myself, I’ll rejoin you, Majesty, as soon as I’m finished with certain matters that will leave us both in better spirits. Now farewell, sire. Remember that you are always in my thoughts and prayers.”

The graybeard said that I had left my uncle with sufficient room for compromise.

“I thank you for your approval,” I returned, “and I’m sure that you—with all your years and wisdom—can deal with any further complaints that he might have. Now deliver this,” I ordered, “and may the gods protect you on your way.” I handed the message over to the graybeard, instructing him to return to Persia with all speed after meeting with Syazarees.

Strive to Achieve a Solemn Sense of Unity

Then I reviewed my fully armed troops—Medes, Hyrcanians, Armenians, and the whole body of Persians. Assembling one’s troops in perfect formation is the best way to remind them that they exist first and last for each other; it also prompts them to recall that true achievement consists of contributing to a common enterprise.

Such displays are no waste of time, for they renew pride in officers and

men alike. The required silence of a review allows everyone to reexperience the essential solemnity of their tasks. As I descended into the midst of the troops to conduct my inspection, I felt more than ever that my people and I were one.

I dismissed the men, and I observed that more of the Assyrians from the surrounding countryside were surrendering, bringing in their horses and handing over their arms. After my troops had taken what they needed for themselves, the javelins were piled in a heap as before and burned at my command. However, I told the owners of the horses to keep ahold on their bridles and await fresh orders.

At that point, with an issue of the utmost importance still waiting to be resolved, I called together the Hyrcanian and Median cavalrymen and spoke as follows, “My friends and allies, our circumstances are changing greatly from day to day, and I want to keep you informed about what’s going on, so you’ll feel completely secure under my command.”

Surprise Your Friends with Shows of Generosity

As usual, I waited until the translators conveyed my meaning to the allies in their own tongues. Then I continued, “At present we have a huge mass of spoils, but no one’s really sure what belongs to each of us. So it’s time to divide our prizes in detail. I want you to decide how it’s going to be done.”

The leaders of the Medes and Hyrcanians were a little dumbfounded and asked me, “How, Prince Cyrus, are we to distribute all the spoils without the help of either you or your generals?”

I met the question with a question. “Do you really think, gentlemen, that everyone has to agree on every detail? Can you never act for me? Can I never act for you?”

When the allies still seemed to hesitate, I said, “I’ll take a case in point. We Persians guarded this booty for you, and we made sure that nothing was stolen. Now it’s up to you to distribute these riches, and we trust you to be fair. There’s a very different benefit that I’d be glad to obtain for us Persians. You see what numbers of horses we’ve already captured—and how many more are being brought in? If these mounts are left riderless they’ll be more trouble than they’re worth. But if we set riders on them, we Persians can fight as troopers at your side. Will you, then, give these horses to us.”

Explain Innovations in Terms of Mutual Advantage

The request came as a surprise, for the nations knew that, from time immemorial, we Persians had mounted only our officers, and even our officers—myself included—usually joined the battle on foot. I silenced the

murmurers, saying, “Today when you dashed ahead to meet danger all alone, we Persians feared for your safety, but that never has to happen again. Once we have horses, we can follow at your heels. Then, if it’s clear that we’ll give you better support mounted, we’ll stay mounted. If it seems better to support you on foot—why, dismounting only takes a moment, and we’ll serve you as infantrymen.”

One of the Median generals stepped forward to say, “In truth, Cyrus, we don’t have enough men for all these horses ourselves, and even if we did, we’d still beg you to take them and use them as you think best.”

“Then I’ll take them gladly!” I exclaimed. “I’m sure that we’ll both show ourselves honorable—you in your division of the spoils and we Persians in our use of the horses.”

Some of the other Medes, I believe, were reluctant to let us Persians enjoy the advantages of cavalry. After all, they’d won more than their share of the spoils because we had lacked horse power. Yet I’d treated them so well that they would have been ashamed to deny my request.

The lesson is clear: You can gain huge benefits by creating debts of gratitude.

At that point I changed the subject as quickly as I could. “As for the spoils, remember to set apart for the gods whatever our magi prescribe. After that, select for Syazarees what you think will please him best.”

The mounted Medes laughed, saying they’d find the king a bevy of fair women.

“So be it,” I said, “fair women and whatever else you please. When you’ve chosen the king’s share, both you Medes and you Hyrcanians should strive to outdo each other in generosity. Try to become as accomplished at sharing the spoils as at sharing the war. Be sure to give some precious things to the officer who came as a messenger from Syazarees—both to him and to his troopers. Persuade them all to stay with us, and say that we’d be grateful for their comradeship. Remind the messenger that the longer he stays with us, the more thorough his report to Syazarees can be.”

Dropping in my next words with nonchalance, I said, “As for my Persians, we’ll be content with whatever’s left over, after you’ve chosen all the spoils you want. As you know, we’re not used to luxury, and I think you’d laugh at us if you saw us in golden robes. In fact, I think we’ll provide you with plenty of entertainment on another score as well.”

“What do you mean?” asked a Median general.

“You’re bound to be amused when you watch Persian foot soldiers falling off the backs of their new horses!”

I was happy when the allies laughed. They then went off to distribute the spoils, while I called my own officers to take charge of the horses and their gear, ordering that mounts be given in equal numbers to each of the Persian divisions.

Acting as a Liberator Creates Extraordinary Loyalty

Finally I sent out a proclamation to announce that all slaves among the captives should come forward and identify themselves. Complying at once, a great crowd quickly gathered. I selected the strongest and granted them freedom. They'd be required to serve in the army, using arms from my growing stores. As for other necessities, I'd make sure that those were also supplied.

Slaves are used to working hard, and they would still be expected to work hard, but they'd have the same advantages as everyone else in my army. When they heard my message, the new freedmen rejoiced in their liberation and took new hope for the future. Many were fated to rise high in the governance of my empire.

Remember this lesson well: Whenever you can, act as a liberator. Freedom, dignity, and wealth—these three together constitute the great happiness of humanity. If you bequeath all three to your people, their love for you will never die.

I led the freedmen to my officers and had them enrolled immediately, instructing that they be armed with shields and light swords, so as to follow the troopers and hold their horses whenever required. For the future, my Persian officers—in body armor and carrying lances—were always to appear on horseback, and they were required to appoint new officers from the ranks to lead those troops who were still without steeds.

BOOK VIII

SHIFTING THE BALANCE

In the midst of all this activity, an aged Assyrian nobleman named Gobryas surrendered to my soldiers and asked for an audience with me. Hearing what he wanted, I made time to see him.

As I emerged from my tent, Gobryas still sat astride a black horse with his mounted retinue behind him. There was a stricken look on his weathered face. Since my apparel suggested nothing about my rank, it took him a few moments to realize who I was. When he did, he immediately dismounted and his men automatically followed his example.

Beckoning Gobryas into my tent, I let him speak freely.

“My lord,” he began, “I’m an Assyrian nobleman by birth. I own a fortress not far from here, and I rule over a wide domain. I have cavalry at my command, two thousand three hundred of them—all of which I offered to the late, gallant king of Assyria. If that unlucky man ever had a friend, I was that friend. Now he’s fallen at your hands, and my bitter foe—his son—reigns in his stead. Therefore I’ve surrendered and come to you as a petitioner.”

Immediately Gobryas fell to his knees. I mildly reproved him for his action and helped him regain his feet. He had to compose himself before he could go on. “I’m ready to be your vassal and your ally,” he continued, “but I implore you to be my avenger. You yourself will be like a son to me, for I have no man child left—not in this world. My only son was the joy of my life, and he treated me with the kind of respect that deeply satisfies a father’s heart, but now he is dead.”

I asked how Gobryas’s son had lost his life.

Gross Injustice Demands a Strong Response

He answered, “My master—the king now slain—once sent for my son, meaning to show him favor at the palace. The crown prince—now the king—invited my son out to hunt. My son and that brutal prince went out together, chatting away like old friends. Suddenly their dogs roused a bear, and the two of them gave chase. The king’s son threw his javelin and missed. Then my son threw his and made the kill! The crown prince felt humiliated, though for the moment he kept his malice hidden. Soon after that their dogs found a mountain lion, and the crown prince threw and missed a second time. Again my son’s javelin flew to the mark, making another quick kill.”

Brushing his eyes with the back of his hand, Gobryas said, “That monstrous prince couldn’t contain his jealousy. He snatched a spear from one of his followers and stabbed my son through the stomach, taking his life. I buried my splendid boy with the first down on his chin, while the crown prince acted as if he’d killed a traitor to the crown and never atoned for his villainy. My king pitied me and tried to share the burden of my grief, but he did nothing to punish the murderous prince, who is now the doomed king of doomed Assyria.”

Gobryas paused for a moment. “Had he lived—the old king—I’d never have turned against his empire, but now his crown has descended to my boy’s murderer. ...” His voice trailed off.

“You can never be loyal to a prince who condemns himself by the deeds of his own hand,” I said.

“No, never, never!” responded Gobryas in a sudden burst. “He’d have to be insane to think of me as a friend! He knows how I feel toward him, and he knows that I pass my days in mourning.”

The old man took my hand but kept his eyes lowered. “If you can help me, Highness—if you give me some hope that my dear son will be avenged, I wouldn’t be overcome with guilt about being alive while my son is dead. When I come to die, my spirit will be consoled.”

Move Quickly to Satisfy Worthy Suppliants

My answer required no thought. I said, “I receive you as a suppliant, Gobryas, and I promise—with God’s help—to avenge your son. Tell me truly,” I added, “if we act in this way, allowing you to keep your stronghold, your land, your men, and your arms, how will you serve us in return?”

He answered, “My fortress will be yours whenever you need it. The tribute I used to pay to Assyria will instead be paid to you. Whenever you march out to battle, I’ll march at your side with all my warriors, who always fight with pride and honor. Moreover, I have a young daughter who is ready to marry and bear children. I’ll let you decide her future, if you use the same good faith to deal with her as I use to deal with you.”

I solemnly said, “Let us join hands, then, as friends and allies. Let God the Almighty Father be the witness to our bond.”

Once we had sworn allegiance to one another, I told Gobryas that he was free to depart in peace; I also said that he and his men could recover their surrendered arms before they went home. Then I asked him how far away he lived, announcing that I’d be coming to visit his fortress soon.

Gobryas said, “If you set off early tomorrow, you’ll be able to lodge with us on the evening after.” With those words he turned away, leaving behind a trusted underling to act as my guide.

As he and his retinue departed, I dwelled in my own thoughts on the

mystery of evil in this world, for Gobryas's story about the murder of his son had touched me to the soul.

Often my spirit grew weary when it felt the weight of the suffering shared by the mass of humanity under the sun. Even my own life—which was touched by the magic of God's hand—had its periods of hopeless anxiety, when I felt my powers diminishing while time flowed away into oblivion. How could anyone possibly console such a man as Gobryas, who was spending his last years in a prison of mental anguish? Revenge him? Gladly, yet I would never be able to rescue his son from the underworld.

Sometimes my self-doubts covered me with darkness. Before God I would ask myself if I were so very different from the cruel little kings who had brought so much misery into the world. I, too, had created my share of orphans and widows—and did my ideals really excuse my use of the sword? I swore to God daily that my larger ambitions would create a new, more perfect life for the people. In my new kingdom, I vowed, every day would bring a rebirth of peace and compassion.

In the meantime, I had to continue my struggle. The Almighty had given me great powers and called me to institute a new realm on earth, and there must always be destruction before the new can appear in all its abundance.

High Cunning Is One Thing, Low Cunning Another

You now know me well enough to discern when I operated behind a veil of disingenuity, but I hope you find the word “lies” too strong to describe the spells that I worked on my men and allies. High cunning is one thing; low cunning is quite another.

Let me beg you to realize that I never delighted in deception. Whenever circumstances allowed, I spoke with honest forthrightness, and as my campaign gained momentum and my grand designs seemed ever more likely to succeed, my speech became increasingly free of obscurantism.

In my next talk before the leading men of the Medes, however, it was still untimely to speak openly of my vision of a new order. Once again I tried to persuade them to remain under my command by appealing to their immediate self-interest.

“Sons of the Medes and gentlemen all,” I said, making a gesture of inclusiveness with my open arms, “I called you here to thank you for your loyalty. Many of you have personally assured me that it isn't love of riches that makes you follow me. You came with the same spirit that makes you stay—for my sake, knowing that it might be a long time before I gather enough wealth to reward you completely. In truth, I'd feel ashamed for both of us if only the promise of gold kept you under my command. I'm not a man to offer bribes, but I can assure you—even if you Medes go back to Syazarees now—that I won't forget your service when the gods reward me.”

These words set the Medes to buzzing. Waiting for their talk to subside, I added, “As for myself, I could never turn back now, for I’m bound by oath to help the Hyrcanians achieve true independence—and that oath also means that I’ll provide them with new opportunities to become merchants and traders when these wars are over. I’ve promised to serve them until they’re satisfied. Moreover, I’m now allied with Gobryas, who’s offered us the use of his castle, his territory, and his large force of cavalry. I’ll never give that noble old gentleman reason to regret coming over to our side. Last of all, I fear the gods too much to turn my back on all the possibilities that they’ve laid before us. These, then, are the promises I have to keep, but it’s for you Medes yourselves to decide where your own true interests lie.”

Thank Your People for Their Continuing Loyalty

The first to answer my plea was my Median cousin Rاسباس. “Listen to me, O King!” he began, “for you are already more than a prince. Our greatest desire is to be ruled by you. When you came to Media to give us aid, didn’t we see for ourselves how eagerly your countrymen followed you? As soon as you’d set your heart on this present expedition, we Medes flocked to your standard with hearts as one. Even here in the enemy’s country we feel secure as long as you’re with us, Cyrus. Without you, we might even be afraid to return to our homes. I can say for both myself and my comrades that we’ll stand by you as long as we’re wanted. For you are Cyrus the Great!”

At that the Medes called out with one voice, “Cyrus the Great! Cyrus the Great!”

It was a name that the Father God allowed me to keep. I thanked all these officers from the bottom of my heart, and then I issued the orders of the day. The allies were to place their guards and see to their own concerns, while we Persians took our share of the newly captured tents and divided them among our cavalry and infantry. We also chose the stewards who would wait on us and keep our horses groomed, freeing us for the work of war.

On the morrow the entire army set out on a march to the castle of Gobryas. I rode at the head of my first Persian cavalry, who were two thousand strong. Slowly but surely I would train them to be a match for the Medes or any other horsemen. For today it was enough that they remain atop their mounts and not grumble too openly when they became saddlesore.

Toward evening of the second day, we found ourselves before the castle of Gobryas. The place was extremely strong and fully prepared for a die-hard defense. Great herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and goats had been driven up under the shelter of the castle walls; from there they’d quickly be driven through the gates if any enemy threatened.

Gobryas sent out word requesting that I circle his citadel on horseback, inspecting it from every angle. Though I looked with great care, I couldn’t

discover a single vulnerable point in its massive walls. Some of my officers, having examined the interior in the meantime, brought me word that Gobryas possessed enough supplies to withstand a two-year siege.

Soon the old warrior himself came out with all his men behind him. They were carrying wine and corn and barley, and driving oxen and goats and swine—and ready to prepare a feast for the entire army.

Take Measures to Protect Your Person

While all the rest were eating outside, Gobryas invited me to enter the castle. Though the old warrior swore that not a single member of his garrison remained inside, he advised me to take every precaution to protect my person. So I sent in scouts and heavily armed soldiers before entering the place myself. I wasn't worried about the old warrior's intentions, but the young king's Assyrians could possibly have hidden assassins in Gobryas's fortress without his knowledge.

Once it was obvious the castle was secure, I had the gates thrown open and sent for all my officers and friends. As my retainers attended me, Gobryas ordered his men to bring out pitchers and cups and coins of gold, as well as chests full of jewels in golden settings on golden chains. There were all sorts of gorgeous objects, and last of all, Gobryas sent for his daughter, who was a miracle of stately beauty, though still dressed in mourning for her brother.

Gobryas then said, "Prince Cyrus, not only do I give you all these riches, I place my daughter in your hands. Above all, we both beg you to avenge my son, her brother."

I said, "I gave you my promise that, if you kept faith with me, I'd satisfy your need for vengeance. Now I repeat that promise to your daughter: With God's help, I'll avenge the death of your brother."

The daughter listened to an interpretation of what I said and gave me the briefest glance of acknowledgment. Then to my surprise she lifted her head again; looking deeply into my eyes, she smiled with gratitude for a long moment. All too soon her expression changed again, and I understood that she now needed to be rescued from these strange men—myself included.

Softly I told her in Persian, "You are free to go now." A movement of my hand helped clarify my meaning. Gobryas's daughter understood my gesture and quietly departed with her attendants.

"As for these costly gifts," I said, turning back to Gobryas, "I accept them, and I hereby award them as a dowry to your daughter—to your daughter and to the man who wins her hand in marriage. I'll take only one gift with me when I go. It's so precious a thing that, even if I had to surrender all the wealth of Babylon to possess it, I'd still cling to this one gift above all others." Gobryas asked what this rare thing could be.

Embrace Every Opportunity to Secure Your Reputation

“I’ll tell you,” I said, once again giving in to my love of oratory. “A man may hate cruelty and lies, but if he’s never given an opportunity to show what he’s made of, no one will remember him when he dies. You, Gobryas, have placed everything in my hands today—this mighty fortress, treasures of every kind, your own power, and a wonderfully desirable daughter. Thus, you’ve given me a chance to show all honest people that they can trust me. This opportunity to secure my reputation is your gift to me, and as long as I breathe, I’ll always be grateful. If the gods continue to bless me, many nations will have the opportunity to live in a new and better world. With the help of my noble friends from Persia, who surround me here, I can make this vision come true.”

Gobryas smiled. “By heaven, I’d like you to choose a son-in-law for me from among these men who are helping you remake the world! Which one, do you think, would be the best match for my daughter?”

I said, “Follow us, and you’ll soon be able to choose him yourself.” I rose and clasped the hand of Gobryas. “Come. Let me be your host at a feast in our camp.”

“No,” insisted the old warrior. “Stay and be entertained here in this comfortable castle.”

Gobryas was eventually persuaded to come with us Persians. When we settled in for a banquet in my sparsely furnished tent, he remarked, “Your Persian fare may be known for its simplicity, but I think you’re the luckiest of men, Prince Cyrus.”

“Why would that be?” I asked.

The old fellow answered, “You possess far, far more than I do, for any place on earth can serve as your home. Any nook or cranny in the world can serve you as a resting place.”

I thanked him for recognizing our Persian willingness to live without luxury. Nevertheless, when the meal was brought in and Gobryas saw the plain fare that was set before him, his face fell. His mood changed again as he observed that my Persian nobles were perfectly content with their food, and that they could hold intelligent conversations even while they ate.

Humor Should Never Be Mixed with Malice

He also noticed that my noblemen only asked questions that were pleasant to answer and never made jokes to belittle their comrades. As Gobryas rose to return home, he said, “I’m beginning to understand, Prince Cyrus, how superior you and your men are. You may not possess as many treasures as other warriors, but you’re worth far more to the gods. Most of us are always trying to increase our wealth, but you and your officers seem far more

concerned with perfecting your souls.”

I nodded at the compliment and said, “My friend, be here without fail in the morning. Bring all your cavalry in full armor, and allow us to make use of them. As for yourself, Gobryas, you must lead us through the countryside and show us which areas are friendly and which are still hostile.”

Actually, I had a more startling plan in mind, but Gobryas was tired and I thought it best to wait until the morrow to reveal my new ambition.

BOOK IX

STRAIGHT ON TO SUCCESS

When the day dawned Gobryas appeared with his cavalry and led the way, but I kept the march under my own control. At length I stopped the column and summoned both Gobryas and the Hyrcanian chief.

I asked them, “Does the royal brute of Assyria suppose that you alone are his enemies—or do you know of others who hate him too?”

“Oh, there are plenty of others,” replied the Hyrcanian. “The Cadousians who live southeast of Armenia are his bitter foes. There are masses of them, and they fight like demons. The Sakians, our own neighbors, suffered terribly at Assyrian hands, but unlike us, they managed to keep their freedom.”

“Do you think,” I asked, “that both the Cadousians and Sakians would be willing to join our alliance and attack the brute of Assyria?”

“Far more than willing,” answered Gobryas, “if they were actually able to join us.”

“However, as it is now, the Assyrians stand in their way,” I observed.

“Even so!” the Hyrcanian exclaimed.

I turned back to Gobryas. “Tell me more about this little brute who now wears the Assyrian crown. I suppose he’s treated others as badly as he’s treated you.”

“Yes, of course,” said the old warrior. “There are so many stories of his cruelty. Let me tell you about one young man named Mandarus, whose father was of very high rank. This lad considered himself a true friend of the brutish prince, but one day at a drinking party the brute had him seized and castrated. Why? Simply because the brute’s favorite courtesan had commented on the lad’s good looks. The brute then claimed that Mandarus had tried to seduce her. Few were fooled. Mandarus now rules his own province, taking the place of his dead father.”

Challenge the Competition on Its Own Ground

“Well, then,” I rejoined, “I suspect he’d welcome us if we came to liberate him from Assyrian rule.”

“I’m more than sure of it,” said Gobryas, “but it’s not so easy to join forces with him.”

“Why is that?”

“Because to do so, we’d have to march right past Babylon on the Euphrates and its huge garrison of Assyrians.”

“What’s the problem with that?” I calmly asked, expecting the answer to be anything but calm.

“Heaven help us!” cried Gobryas. “That city only has to open her gates, and she can send out an army a hundred times larger than ours! That’s why,” he added, “the Assyrians have underestimated you so far. They’ve been thinking of your army as a kitten to their own lion, and reports of your weakness have gone the rounds. Please, Prince Cyrus, if you must advance, advance with the utmost caution!”

I listened and replied. “You do well, Gobryas, to advise caution, but I’m convinced that a direct advance on Babylon is our safest route. I’ve heard from many sources that most of the Assyrian army has taken refuge in that great city. There in Babylon is an army that’s still mourning its dead. There in Babylon is an army that’s still nursing the wounds that were opened by our weapons. They’re still having nightmares about our bravery in battle, and they’re still terrified that they’ll have to fight us again. If we march straight at them, we’ll probably discover that they’re far too intimidated to come out and face us.”

Wield Psychology Like a Weapon

Gobryas tried to protest, but I silenced him, adding, “You can be sure of this: Men in a great mass can be irresistible, but when their courage is destroyed by a conqueror, panic spins their heads around, and the greater their numbers, the worse their panic can become. Panic can rise to such a pitch that no leader, however steady, can quell it with words. No man can arouse the old courage by ordering a charge; no man can revive the old confidence by retreating. The more their leaders work at restoring their spirits, the worse the soldiers take their danger to be.”

Even as I spoke, I could perceive that the minds of the old warrior and the Hyrcanian chieftain were changing. I added, “Remember also that our enemies are far fewer now that we’ve beaten them, while we’re stronger for being conquerors. And we’re actually more numerous because you and your men have joined us, Gobryas. Besides, there’s only one thing more frightening than an army that’s ready to fight, and that’s when such an army is marching straight at you. So now we must advance directly on Babylon.”

I redirected the march, and on the fourth day we found ourselves at the limit of Gobryas’s territory. Since we were now in the enemy’s country, I changed my structure of command, putting the infantry directly under my own control, with enough cavalry to support them, and sending the rest of the mounted troops to pillage the land. I told my horsemen to cut down every armed man who refused to surrender and to drive in the rest, along with all the cattle they could find. My new Persian cavalymen were ordered to take part in this raid, and though many came back empty-handed, others brought back

plenty of useful things.

After I had all the spoils placed in a single location, I summoned the officers of the Medes and the Hyrcanians as well as my own peers and said, “My friends, you’ll remember that Gobryas generously saw to our every need at his fortress. How about it then? After we’ve set aside the customary portion for the gods and a fair share for the army, why not give the rest of these spoils to Gobryas?”

Prompt Your Friends to Speak in Your Behalf

Kryzantos rose and said, “By all means, Cyrus, let’s do so. Gobryas probably thinks we’re poor because we don’t drink from golden goblets. If we give him most of these spoils he’ll understand that we don’t enrich ourselves until we make our friends wealthy first.”

If Kryzantos’s speech sounds remarkably like my own point of view, it’s because I wrote down the words for him to memorize and repeat. To give credit where it’s due, his delivery was very convincing.

“Come then,” I said, “let’s give the priests their share, select what the army needs, and then summon Gobryas to take the rest.”

As soon as my suggestions had been carried out, I pressed on toward Babylon with my army in battle array. Since the Assyrians refused to come out and meet us, I ordered Gobryas to ride forward and deliver a message that I wrote with the enemy’s overwrought nerves in mind. It read, “If the new king of Assyria will come out and fight for his land, I, Gobryas, will fight for him, but if he refuses to defend himself, my men and I will transfer our allegiance to Prince Cyrus of Persia.”

Gobryas ventured forward just far enough to deliver the message in safety. The enemy king quickly sent a messenger with the reply. “Your rightful master says this to you, Gobryas: ‘I don’t regret slaying your son, old fool, but I do regret letting you live. Come back again a month from now. At the moment we don’t have the spare time to trample you underfoot, since our preparations for a war to annihilate Cyrus and his Persians are keeping us preoccupied. When we’ve finished with him, we’ll be sure to turn to you.’ ”

Let Old Grudges Seal New Alliances

I let Gobryas compose his own defiant answer to the Assyrian’s arrogance. As soon as he had finished, I said, “Tell me again about Mandarus who was made a eunuch by this unkingly king. How can you be so sure that he’ll take our side?”

“Because,” he answered, “Mandarus and I have spoken in confidence to each other many times, and his inner rebellion always struck me as the equal

of my own.”

“Then you must go to him soon and bring him around to our side. Of course you and Mandarus must keep his intention to betray the Assyrian king a deep secret.”

“Yes,” agreed Gobryas, “and I know that Mandarus will do anything to punish the king of Assyria. What should I tell him to do for us?”

“You once spoke of an outpost,” I reminded Gobryas, “built to protect the Assyrian Empire against the Cadousians and the Sakians in time of war. Would the eunuch Mandarus be admitted there by the Assyrian commander if he came with a powerful force of his own men?”

“I’m sure he would,” said Gobryas, “if he were as free from suspicion as he is today.”

“Well, then, we’re going to ensure that he stays free of suspicion by using a little stratagem.” I then proposed that I attack the eunuch’s fortress as though in earnest, while actually allowing Mandarus’s men to beat me back. “What’s more, the eunuch will just happen to capture several of my soldiers, who’ll tell him that I’m on my way to attack the outpost that guards against the Cadousians and Sakians. At that point,” I continued, “Mandarus should dash off with a hundred or more of his men to the outpost, pretending that he’s come to warn its commander.”

Script Stratagems that Bring Success

“If things go according to plan,” said Gobryas, anticipating me, “the commander will admit Mandarus and all his men. He might even beg the eunuch to stay there until you withdraw.”

“So then,” I summarized, “Mandarus will capture the place from within and turn it over to us. In war a man can sometimes do his friends a world of good by pretending to be their enemy.”

“I think that will happen as you wish,” said Gobryas.

“Then be off at once,” I said with excitement, “and teach Mandarus his part. When you’ve arranged these affairs, come back to me.”

Presently Gobryas brought back word that the eunuch was prepared to put our plan into action, so I proceeded to make my feigned attack on the following day. The four Persian officers who were “captured” by Mandarus when I “retreated” were actually men whom I had instructed to surrender and play along with the game.

Once Mandarus had interrogated the four in the presence of witnesses, he got his force together and set out in the night to warn the outpost that I was coming. They galloped as hard as possible for several days before arriving on the marches of Assyria.

Trusted and welcomed as a deliverer, Mandarus was embraced by the commander of the outpost, but as soon as I appeared with my army outside,

the eunuch seized the place, aided by the men he'd brought with him. This deception had the great advantage of saving lives on both sides, and it hastened matters wonderfully when time was—as time so often is—of the essence.

When our victory was secure, Mandarus came out to meet me at the gates of the outpost, bowing down according to the custom of his land. As I drew him back up to his feet, he said, “Your Highness, may joy be yours!”

Tactical Victories Alter Strategic Equations

“Joy is mine already, Mandarus,” I answered, “and you are its cause. I set great store by this fortress, and I’m delighted to leave it under the protection of my allies here.”

At that instant the Hyrcanian chief came running up to me. Seizing me by the hand he cried out, “O Cyrus, what a godsend you are to your friends!”

“Then thank the gods with all your heart,” I said, “and occupy this outpost. Take it and make the best use of it you can, for your own nation and for all our allies, and above all for Mandarus, our friend, who now surrenders it to us.”

“Then,” said the chieftain, “as soon as the Cadousians get here along with the Sakians and my own countrymen, we must call a council and invite everyone, and see how to make the most of this victory.”

Once all of my new allies had arrived, we met together and decided to garrison the post with a common force chosen from all who valued the place as a means of intimidating the Assyrians. My Cadousians, Sakians, and Hyrcanians were in a state of ferocious bliss, imagining the great victories still to come. New levies of their troops kept arriving, until the Cadousians had sent me twenty thousand light infantry and four thousand cavalry. The Sakians contributed eleven thousand bowmen—ten thousand on foot and one thousand mounted. For their part, the Hyrcanians were now free to call up all their reserves of infantry and add several thousand strong to their cavalry.

While I attended to the reorganization of the fortress, demoralized Assyrians from all over the surrounding territory brought in their horses and handed over their arms. I used the horses to mount hundreds more of my Persians.

Banish Emotion from Your Decision Making

The next day Mandarus came and told me that the little brute of Assyria, receiving early word of our victory here, was up in arms. Apparently, he meant to forego the thirty days of preparation he'd mentioned in his letter to Gobryas and was mustering his forces for an immediate attack. I was pleased

to hear that anger was consuming him, for nothing is better than anger for driving an enemy to foolhardy extremes.

“If you, Cyrus,” said Mandarus, “will let me go now, I will try to save my fortresses from the brute.”

I asked, “If you go now, when will you reach home?”

He replied, “On the third day from this I can be in personal charge of my own citadel.”

“Do you think you’ll find the Assyrian brute already there?”

“I’m almost sure of it,” he answered, “for he’ll move quickly while you’re still far away.”

“When,” I inquired, “could I be there with my army?”

“My lord, with your army now so huge, you can’t be expected to reach my home in fewer than six days.”

“Well,” I replied, “be off yourself, Mandarus. Make haste, and I’ll follow as quickly as I can. Remember, as we part ways, that you’re going to be greatly rewarded for all your hard work.”

Mandarus bowed graciously and left. I called together the allied officers and told them how crucial it was to follow the eunuch as soon as possible. “Let each of us,” I ordered, “choose an escort for our wagons and beasts of burden. Since we’ve got to travel fast, they’ll have to follow along at some distance behind us, so I’m putting Gobryas at their head. He’s well acquainted with these roads and he’s a man of skill, so our possessions will be safe in his care.”

Continuing, I said, “We ourselves will push on with our strongest men and horses, taking enough provisions to last for three days—no more. The lighter our load, the sooner we’ll rejoin Mandarus, who’s ridden ahead into unknown dangers. We have to be prepared to march by night.” Indeed, my chief thought at that point was to save Mandarus from falling into the hands of the little brute. If he perished because we were slow to follow, I’d never be able to think of him without remorse.

Refuse to Make Your Friends Expendable

As a matter of honor, I never allowed myself to consider that my allies were expendable. A true leader of any sort must surround each and every subordinate with a cordon of safety. It is never enough to overcome the enemy. If we fail to protect our own people at the same time, we cannot in good conscience continue to exercise power.

Briefing the allied officers on how all our forces would be deployed, I emphasized that strict silence had to be maintained during the night marches ahead. “In the darkness,” I reminded them, “the ears and not the eyes are what guide our actions. Any confusion that creates a chaotic burst of noise,” I told them, “could prove disastrous.”

“Gentlemen,” I concluded, “I expect you all to present yourselves on the road to Babylon with everything you require, and as each detachment starts, let its members pass down the word for those in the rear to follow.”

My troops ate supper, posted their guards, got their necessities together, and enjoyed a few hours of rest. At midnight the horns were blown and the entire camp was roused and prepared for the night march. I’d told my favorite general Kryzantos to wait for me at a point on the road in front of the troops. When we met I put the scouts under his command. “Set out now, Kryzantos,” I said, “but go slowly until you receive further orders, for there are still some troops that haven’t formed up yet.”

Delve into Details Whenever Details Count Most

I then took my stand on a hastily constructed review platform surrounded by dozens of torches and, as each division came up, I hurried it forward to its place. I also sent messengers to summon those in the rear.

After I’d set all the allies into motion, I dispatched a horseman to Kryzantos to tell him that the whole army was now under way, and that he might lead on as quickly as he could. Then I galloped to the head of the massive column, reined up, and watched the ranks pass before me. Whenever a division advanced in silence and good order, I complimented its men. If I heard any sounds of confusion, I investigated the matter and restored tranquility.

One point remains to be added to the description of the care I took that night: I sent forward a small, elite body of infantry in advance of everyone but the scouting detachment. Their job was to use their ears and all their wits, and report at once to Kryzantos if they thought that something was amiss. Their general directed their movements and passed on any important communications from me or my staff.

Thus we marched through the darkness, and we were well pleased by the excellent roads that the Assyrians had built to expedite the movement of their own troops by day and night—a crystal-clear example of turning the enemy’s strengths against him.

When day broke I ordered the mass of the cavalry to the head of the column; the Cadousian horsemen alone remained with their own infantry, who brought up the rear. I sent the rest of the cavalry ahead because that was where the enemy lay. In case of sudden resistance, I was eager to counterattack the Assyrians furiously, and if they fled, to lose no time in starting the pursuit.

Strength Increases with Unity

I was always careful to choose which of my horsemen were to give chase if the enemy appeared, and which were to remain at my side, and I never

allowed the whole army to be broken up. Thus I conducted the advance, but you mustn't think that I stayed with the same unit. In actuality, I was always galloping up and down the column, first accompanying one division and then another, supervising everything and correcting any problem that arose.

Luckily, I had returned to the head of the army by the time that crisis came. Almost from out of nowhere, the whole force of the Assyrian cavalry suddenly galloped down to challenge us. Other armies of like size would have been put to flight by such an unexpected show of force, but, since all my divisions were in good order and on alert, we held our ground.

The enemy horsemen were intimidated by our stand and gave up their attack before it could be fully developed. I sent most of the Median cavalry out in pursuit and then started to investigate why my advance parties hadn't warned me about the attack. In the end I found that the Assyrians had used their knowledge of the terrain to approach us with great stealth, and it was impossible to accuse any of my men of dereliction of duty. If one person was most to blame, it was I.

After my cavalry had broken off their pursuit of the fleeing enemy, I heard that Mandarus had been wounded. A traitor in his midst, hoping to win a great reward from the Assyrian king for killing Mandarus, had stabbed him in the chest.

As soon as I heard of Mandarus's whereabouts, I speedily rode to help him, hoping I could ease his pain. He was, first of all, amazed to discover that my army and I had been so near, and he praised us for our speed. Though his wound was a full inch deep, he refused to accept it as a serious hindrance. I was proud to call him friend.

In the meantime, a serious setback had struck my new Cadousian allies.

BOOK X

THE KINDNESS OF FRIENDS

Since they brought up the rear, the Cadousian horsemen had been too distant to join in the pursuit of the Assyrian cavalry, so they wanted to do something on their own—something that would win them a mountain of spoils. Their chieftain hit upon a bold plan. Without conferring with me, he ordered his troopers to abandon their place in the column and pillage the country that lay just outside Babylon.

As soon as the mounted Cadousians scattered to conduct their raids, the enemy emerged from their city of refuge in battle order. Since the Cadousians were unsupported by my larger forces, the Assyrians attacked and killed their chieftain and hundreds of their men, capturing their horses and recapturing their freshly gathered spoils.

The Assyrian brute had a personal hand in this action, pursuing the survivors as far as he dared before retreating to safety behind the massive walls of Babylon. The surviving Cadousians were reunited in their own camp after a harrowing retreat.

Indiscipline Presages Defeat

I was still attending the wounded Mandarus when I learned what had happened. Rather than blind myself with rage, I tried to be philosophical. I had known, after all, that leaders can suffer as much from the indiscipline of their followers as from the hostility of their foes. With my fighting generals beside me, I calmly went out to meet the defeated Cadousians. We consoled each of the bleeding men before sending them back to Mandarus to have their wounds dressed.

Mandarus was grieved by the sight of so many sufferers, and he ordered his own lieutenants to join him in the work of relieving their pain. When the hour for dinner came and his officers went off to eat, Mandarus was still there with the surgeons and their assistants. He refused to leave a single man untended—and all this in spite of his own fresh wound.

At dawn I sent out messengers to summon all my officers and the entire Cadousian army to an assembly. The faces of the Cadousians were clouded with foreboding, since so many commanders in my place would have condemned them to harsh punishments, but I wanted to see these allies restored to self-confidence, not driven deeper into despair. What the Cadousians needed, I knew, was to learn from their mistake and submit to

greater discipline. I would use the voice of reason, not the thunder of judgment.

Mild Rebuke Works Better Than Loud Condemnation

“My friends and allies,” I began, “what has happened is only natural, for it is human nature to make mistakes. This bitter event has taught us a valuable lesson, which is never to send forth a detachment weaker than the enemy from the main body of our army.”

It occurred to me that I should clarify my meaning. “I’m not saying that smaller groups should never take action, but before setting off you must get permission from me. If I like your plan, we’ll take steps to keep a line of communication open between us. Then, if you meet unexpected resistance, I can send you reinforcements to drive off the enemy. Any one of fifty or so tactics can be used to distract the enemy and rescue one’s friends.”

In driving the point home, I added, “But if you bolt away without revealing your intentions, you’re no better off than if you were alone in the middle of the enemy’s empire.”

I paused before changing my tone. “If the gods are willing, we’ll have our revenge for this setback, and we’ll begin as soon as you’ve all eaten. In fact, I myself will lead you back to the scene of yesterday’s skirmishes, and there we’ll bury the bodies of our dead friends, and we’ll give our enemies a good reason not to celebrate the day when they killed our comrades.”

My words seemed to join with the rays of the rising sun in restoring the morale of my allies. I told them what to do next. “I want you Cadousians to elect a leader who’ll guide you wisely—and always be willing to accept help from us, your allies. When you’ve chosen your leader and eaten your breakfast, send him to me.”

They did as I commanded, and when I led the army out, I stationed their new leader by my side and told him to keep his warriors just behind us. “The two of us,” I said, “will restore their morale and fill them with new courage.”

We marched out and solemnly buried the Cadousian dead. Then we waited for the enemy to come forth from behind the walls of Babylon, but the Assyrian brute slyly chose not to oppose us, now that we had appeared in strength. We pillaged the countryside without opposition and, when we were done, we went back to the province of Mandarus, laden with supplies that we’d taken from the foe.

Negotiate Beneficial Agreements Despite Mutual Distrust

In the fortress of Mandarus, which, despite our fears, the Assyrians had failed

to assault, my concerns shifted to helping the innocent. Several hundred agricultural workers who lived around Babylon had come over to my side, and they might be murdered if I didn't guard them constantly—a service that was very difficult to render. Thus I sent an ambassador to the Assyrian brute with a promise that I would leave all his tillers of the soil unhindered if all those now under my protection could continue to farm in peace.

“You must realize,” I added at the end of my message, “that even if you attack my farmers, there are relatively few of them for you to harm. You, on the other hand, control a large territory where I could put an end to all cultivation. As for the crops,” I observed, “if we have war, the conqueror will reap them, but if we have peace, it will be you.”

When the Assyrian brute's advisers heard this message, they urged the king to accept my proposal. Whether swayed by their wishes or due to his own desire, the brute consented to my terms. We then committed the agreement to writing, proclaiming peace to farmers and war to all who carried arms. Even within an environment of intense competition, there are opportunities to reduce human distress through reasoned cooperation.

Soon the time came for my forces to leave Mandarus's domain and go forth against the walls of Babylon. As the final preparations were being made, Mandarus brought me all kinds of presents. Among these riches were fine horses taken from his own troopers whom he distrusted because of the conspiracy that had left him wounded.

Showing me these presents, Mandarus said, “Cyrus, please use all these things however you can. Everything else that I call my own is also yours, for I can father no son to inherit my wealth.”

Here the words died on his lips, and the pain in his eyes made him seem like the loneliest man in the world.

Keep Your Noblest Supporters at Your Side

I said to him, “The mystery of evil oppresses everyone at times, but we must keep the faith that our sorrows will one day be replaced by joys. I accept the horses with pleasure, Mandarus, for I can mount more of my men on them—bringing my Persian cavalry up to ten thousand strong. But please, take back all these other riches, and guard them safely until I can match your generosity with my own.”

“I trust you in all things, Cyrus,” Mandarus replied. “But I'm really not capable of guarding all these riches myself. While I was at peace with the king of Assyria, the estate that I inherited from my father was among the richest in the empire. As you know very well, Babylon is nearby, so all the good things that can be purchased in a great city were available to my people, yet we could still turn our backs on the chaos of that great metropolis, just by making the short journey home. Now we're at war, and the moment you leave

us we're sure to be surrounded. Whatever you do, the Assyrian brute will still have enough strength to menace me anew."

Mandarus was no alarmist, and I had to assume that his fears were realistic. I said, "Listen, I owe you your own safety above all else. Let me put a strong garrison in this fortress, to make it safe for you whenever you need it. Then come with me to march against Babylon, so that you can help defeat the scoundrel who has filled your years with bitterness."

"You will really let me ride with you to Babylon?" asked the startled eunuch.

"I will, Mandarus, since you seem to be untroubled by your wound. Go and prepare to take the field against the Assyrian. You will serve me well, and when my empire is won, I'll be sure to show you my gratitude."

When Mandarus heard my words, he breathed again and said, "Will you give me time to make my preparations?"

"Of course, but put wings on your feet!"

Moderate Boldness with Caution

Thus I kept Mandarus by my side, and he led the army to places where water and food and fodder were abundant.

When we came within sight of Babylon once again, it seemed that the road we were following led straight up to its massive walls. Therefore I summoned Gobryas and Mandarus and asked them to show me another way, one that didn't put us at the mercy of the Assyrians on the ramparts.

"There are many other ways, my lord," answered Gobryas, "but I thought you'd wish to pass as close to the city as possible, to display the size and splendor of your army to the brutish king. When your forces were smaller you didn't hesitate to advance to his walls and let him see us, and I think that a good look at our new numbers will give his self-confidence a good shaking."

I said, "Gobryas, it shouldn't surprise you that I'm more cautious today. Now we have to give constant protection to our long, straggling lines of wagons, so our forces have to be thinned out. If the brute chooses to concentrate his attack at one particular spot, he can break our line, and the length of our line means a long delay while we reconcentrate our own forces."

"That much is surely true," Mandarus joined in. "I wonder if it's really feasible to get any closer than we are now."

"There's still one way to make this work," I said. "If we avoid a close approach to the walls of Babylon, leaving a distance between ourselves and them as wide as our line is long, we'll be able to foresee where they're going to attack from a long way off, and then we can reconcentrate our forces and be ready to welcome them with our weapons."

"If we do that," commented Gobryas, "leaving a lot of ground for them to cross once they come out, it's far more likely that the Assyrian won't make

the attempt at all.”

“I think you’re right about that,” I said to my ally.

He was, too. Not a single Assyrian detachment came out of Babylon to harass us, and we were able to proceed with a new mission that had to be accomplished before we came to grips with the great city.

Attack Outlying Strong Points First

Our new mission was this: To secure my army’s rear and flanks before beginning the final campaign. Therefore I led my army back to Babylonia’s northern frontier, where the territories of Assyria and Media came together. Three substantial Assyrian fortresses still dominated this corner of the world, and it wouldn’t be safe to attack Babylon until all three belonged to me. Using the classic strategy of attacking the weakest first, we overran the place called Hartra after a short siege.

My goal was to employ cunning and diplomacy before resorting to force. In my attempt to minimize the harm inflicted on my own troops—as well as on the fortresses and populations that might soon be mine—I was always eager to negotiate a reasonable peace. At this juncture, my most useful friend was Mandarus and his reputation for compassion and honesty. He ably served as my ambassador with the two fortresses that remained, and without great delay they surrendered and became valuable assets in my growing empire.

Now that I was back on the borders of Media, I could no longer avoid reengaging with my uncle Syazarees. Day by day, his presence at the back of my mind had become an ever greater irritant, for I knew that, with his mighty cavalry still under my command, he must be looking on me as a sort of usurper—and wondering if I might be planning to steal the Median crown. As a matter of honor I needed to ease his fears.

Strive to Pacify the Alienated

I sent a message to Media, offering to come all the way to Syazarees’s capital if he so desired. He decided instead to meet me in the deserts of northern Babylonia.

The second Persian force that I had asked my father and the supreme council to send out had finally arrived, forty thousand bowmen and javelin throwers. Syazarees had my permission to use them as he pleased, but he refused to feed them. Since he knew that I and the main body of the army were relatively close by, the Persian general in command of the second force put himself at the head of his troops and marched off to join me in the desert.

Syazarees himself waited until the next day to set out with the paltry force of Median troopers and bodyguards who had remained loyal to him. When I

learned of his approach, I marched forward with my Persian cavalry—who now made up a regular horde—along with all the best-mounted and best-armed Medes, Hyrcanians, Armenians, Cadousians, and Sakians.

Actually, it was a mistake to meet my uncle with a parade of my allies. When Syazarees saw my brilliant new cavalry, he glanced again at his own little retinue and mortification filled his heart. When I sprang from my horse and came up to embrace him, Syazarees did dismount, but he roughly pushed me away. Tears welled in his eyes while resentment, as I could see, burned in his heart.

To my generals I issued instructions to have the mounted army stand aside to rest, while I led my reluctant uncle to a stand of palm trees, ordering my attendants to lay down Median carpets before him.

There I made Syazarees sit. I placed myself beside him and said, “Dear uncle, I beg you, in heaven’s name, tell me why you’re so angry with me! What has filled you with such bitterness?”

Recognize the Dormant Power in Those Around You

It was a terribly chancy moment in my career. If my uncle had called the army together and addressed them with real eloquence, he might have succeeded in portraying me as the villain of this piece, and all my dreams might have turned to dust. The great force that I’d been assembling for the conquest of Babylon might have disintegrated within the hour.

My uncle answered, “Listen well, Cyrus, and be honest with me. My grandfather was a king, and my father was a king, and not so long ago I had every reason to think of myself as a king, but now I see myself here like a humble petitioner, while you’ve arrived in great splendor with a magnificent army of allies—followed by thousands of horsemen that were once my own! Watching an enemy win over my forces would be bad enough, but it’s even worse to be shoved aside by my own nephew, who I can still see in my mind’s eye as a little boy! I wish the earth had opened up and swallowed me before I ever lived to see this day.”

I tried to reply but he blocked me. “It’s clear,” Syazarees said, raising his voice until it almost cracked, “that I stand defenseless before you, even when there are thousands of my own troopers nearby!”

My uncle wailed so miserably that my own eyes filled with tears, while guilt lay like lead on the chambers of my heart. There was silence between us, and then I said, “No, Syazarees, you don’t understand the real truth. Your eyes are deceiving you, for those horsemen are still yours, and there’s no one here who wishes you any harm.”

“You think you can deceive me with such words?” my uncle spat out, suddenly turning venomous.

“I seem to have said the wrong thing,” I gently replied, “but you risk

turning old friends into new enemies when you give in to suspicion and answer me with such angry words.”

Syazarees muttered something about upstart youth. I said, “This is exactly why I didn’t return your cavalry to you earlier. I knew I needed to be present when you met them again. If you had faced them alone, your curses might have caused them to break all their ties with you, and even to wish you dead. You don’t realize that I’ve been protecting you.”

“You have plotted against me!” Syazarees insisted.

“Uncle,” I returned, “now’s the time to tell me exactly how I’ve hurt you. If you can prove I’ve done you harm, I’ll confess my guilt; but if I can prove that I’ve never injured you, not even in thought, will you quit accusing me?”

“So I must,” said Syazarees, regaining partial control of himself.

“If I can prove that I’ve supported you to the utmost of my power, may I not receive a little praise in place of your curses?”

“Please, Nephew. You will try my patience until nothing is left.”

BOOK XI

MASTERING THE EGO

My uncle's words added to my discomfort, so I hurried on. "Then," I said, trying to speak as though my conscience were perfectly clear, "didn't you send me a message that asked me to come to your aid against the Assyrians? Didn't I come with the best and bravest men that I could bring?"

"So history may record," Syzarees answered neutrally.

"Tell me, before we go further, didn't I serve you well?"

"In the beginning you did," my uncle specified.

"When we met the enemy in war, did you ever see me hesitate to do my duty?"

"No, I never did," Syzarees grudgingly replied. "Afterward, when the enemy retreated and my generals and I begged you to join us in the pursuit, can you accuse me of selfishness in that?"

My uncle's expression suggested that I'd insulted his intelligence. An embarrassing silence followed, and I felt my argument swiftly collapsing around me. Finally I blurted out, "Remember how I begged you to lend me some of your cavalry? And how you agreed that I could take command of all those who volunteered?"

Be as Honest with Yourself as You Are with Others

Syzarees, however, had a question for me. "Do you remember getting my permission to take my entire cavalry?"

My speech became still more rapid and compressed. "Haven't I driven your chief enemy from his own homeland and confined his army within the walls of Babylon? Isn't his destruction more than half accomplished? Haven't I done this to avenge his designs on your empire?"

"You might be ashamed," my uncle said, "if you could bring yourself to answer your own questions in strict honesty."

I felt forced into silence. I remained so motionless that I might have been turned into marble.

At that moment Syzarees seemed to regain full possession of his own powers. "Cyrus," he said mildly, "I can't claim that you ever made my humiliation your chief aim, but what you've supposedly done for me has come at a high price. If only I could have made Persia greater! Instead I had to see Media exalted by you! Your recent deeds are a crown of glory on your

brows, but they bring dishonor to me. As for wealth, I'd rather have given it to you than received it from you! As for my subjects, what if they decide that your victories have made you their real king?"

I tried to interject a remark to suggest the folly of his fears, but he returned me to silence with a sharp movement of his bejeweled hand. "Perhaps," he continued, "you find it stupid of me to react like this, but try to imagine yourself in my place. Suppose a friend of yours courted your beloved wife and ended by making her love him more than yourself. Would his wonderful manners make you happy?"

"No," I admitted in shame, finding nothing further to add.

My uncle went on, more convincingly than ever. "What if you entrusted a friend with his choice of your favorite possessions? What if he took everything he could lay his hands on and carried it off and grew rich himself by using your wealth—while you were left in poverty. Well, Cyrus, you've treated me exactly like that."

"But—"

When Blameworthy, Humble Yourself Before Critics

Again he silenced me with a hacking motion of his hand. "I did grant you permission to take what you could use of my army, but you took the whole of my one great force—my cavalry—and left me powerless. Today you bring the spoils you've won and lay them grandly at my feet—and you claim that you're magnanimous!"

The force of his sarcasm was almost as palpable as a slap in the face, yet his diatribe was not yet complete. "You make Media great by using my own men, while I have no part in the performance. Finally I have to show up like a courtesan to collect your favors, and I'm supposed to celebrate you as the great man! And I? I'm obviously not fit to wear a crown!"

His eyes blazed out toward mine, which I lowered at once. Without my willing it, my head fell forward at the neck, and I found myself submitting to my own humiliation. No desert on earth had ever seemed so desolate as my present degradation. I silently admitted that I'd been carried away by my own sense of destiny, and I promised myself that, henceforth, I would control my ambition.

Though I had fought for a just new order, in my relationship with my uncle I had fallen prey to childish egotism. I had acted as if I had to neutralize Syazarees before achieving greatness in my own right. The relationship of distrust that had developed between myself and my uncle had been the work of my overbearing pride, and I vowed never again to act with such arrogance.

Syazarees himself proceeded to point the moral for me. "Are these—I ask you, Cyrus—are these the deeds of a loyal nephew? What gain have I—"

I managed to break in, crying out, "Uncle Syazarees, Majesty of Media, by

heaven above us, if I've ever shown you any kindness, please be kind to me now! Please don't denounce me any more. I know that I've treated you badly, and I alone am the cause of all this tension between us. I've failed myself as well as you. Wait, and give me another chance, and I'll make up for the grief I've caused you. For now, please, let me take you by the hand!"

My plea proved timely, for Syazarees could tell that his denunciation had touched me to the quick. In condemning my actions with such eloquence, he had regained, I believe, a sense of control over both himself and his kingdom. He seemed on the verge of relenting. "Perhaps," answered Syazarees, "I will do as you wish."

Let Everyone Witness Your Acts of Reconciliation

"Then here is my hand," I said, getting up.

His attendants helped him to his feet. Once fully upright, he slowly but surely extended his own hand.

When the army saw this sign of reconciliation, they raised their voices, roaring in approval. Syazarees and I mounted our horses, while the Medes, at a nod from me, fell in behind my uncle. I vowed to let him be what he truly was, the senior partner in this enterprise. If he chose to lead I would follow him.

When we reached the camp, I brought Syazarees to the sumptuous tent that I had previously ordered to be set up in his honor. The stewards were there to provide whatever he wanted; and while he was waiting for the banquet, his Medes presented themselves graciously before him.

One of his generals gave him a beautiful cupbearer, another general offered him a cook who specialized in delicacies, while a third general presented him with a wonderfully talented musician. Other senior officers brought Syazarees cups and goblets and beautiful apparel. Even the lower ranks gave something out of the spoils that they'd won. So the mood of the king changed, and he seemed convinced that I hadn't alienated him from his subjects' affections after all.

When the hour arrived for the banquet that I'd arranged, Syazarees sent me a message requesting that I share it with him, since our long separation had left us with so much to discuss. Nevertheless, I answered, "Thank you for your invitation to the feast, Royal Uncle, but I must remain in the company of my soldiers. Men may easily feel themselves neglected after they've been through great adventures and expect plenty more to come. With you it's different: You've taken a long journey to reach this place, and you must enjoy your rest and entertainment without delay. Welcome your subjects, King Syazarees, and be thankful for all they've done in your behalf. If misunderstandings have arisen between you and any of them, I'm sure you'll soon have things straightened out."

I added that early the next morning all the allied leaders would come before him to ask what our next step should be. “It is you,” I wrote, “who will tell us whether we ought to continue with the campaign or disband the army.”

Honor the Psychological Needs of Others

When dawn broke, the allies flocked to the tent of King Syazarees. First came the Cadousians, and then the Hyrcanians, and after them the Sakians, and then Gobryas and two of his lieutenants. Finally my general Hestifer brought in Mandarus—and I prepared all of them to ask my uncle to give the war his blessing, for, I said, Syazarees alone would decide what to do next.

Mandarus was on tenterhooks, worried to death that the army would be disbanded before the Assyrian had been brought to justice. To set him at his ease I made light of his fears, but he was slow to laugh.

“If you leave, Cyrus, I’m utterly ruined.”

“I have a confession to make,” Hestifer said to me, “for I told Mandarus a lie—as a joke. I said that it would be impossible for you to finish the campaign, since your father was demanding your return home.”

“Your joke was cruel. But you, Hestifer,” I continued, “aren’t you the one who really wants to go home to Persia?”

“No, not in the least,” he said with a smile. “I’m going to stay here and take your place as general-in-chief until I make that little Assyrian ass the slave of Mandarus.”

Syazarees came forth to and sat down on an elaborate Median throne. After silence was proclaimed, my uncle began. “Friends and allies, since I am senior to Cyrus, I will address you first.”

I duly displayed my respect by bowing toward the throne, and the king continued in a self-assured voice. “The moment has come to discuss the key question: Should we go on with the campaign, or should we return to our homes?” He looked out over the assembled men before adding, “We will now listen to your opinions on the matter.”

Grant Your Supporters Freedom of Speech

The Hyrcanian leader rose at once and said, “Friends and allies, do we really need to hold a discussion when the right path lies so plainly before us? When we Hyrcanians stood alone, the Assyrians treated us however they liked, but since we’ve come together as allies, we’ve got the Assyrians holed up in Babylon, and now we can finish them off.”

The Cadousian chieftain followed. “I agree with the Hyrcanian. The less we talk about breaking up, the better. Unity is the father of victory, but fragmenting our forces has always led to misfortune, even on the march. As

you're bound to remember, my men and I recently paid a high price for going off on our own."

Then rose Rspas the Mede. "Mighty King Syazarees," he said, "I want this campaign to continue, for I've always been on campaign, even back home in Media. Though living in our own country, Your Majesty, I was always out on some expedition or other, because our farmers and townspeople were being raided and our fortresses on the border with the Assyrians were being menaced. Peace—if you can call it that—was a world of trouble for me. Now that we've taken the offensive, we occupy the enemy's forts and eat his food and drink his wine, and if we keep up the fight, his once-mighty empire will belong to us and no one else. That alone will mean real peace."

Then Gobryas spoke. "Friends," he began, "I've never regretted placing my trust in Cyrus, since, unlike so many leaders, he's always as good as his promises. But if he returns to Persia now, the Assyrian king will never be punished for the evil he tried to inflict on you and did inflict on me. I'll be punished instead because I've been your friend."

At that point I arose and said, "Your Majesty, disbanding our forces will mean the collapse of our power and the sudden increase of the Assyrian's. If some of his men have given up their weapons, they'll soon find others. If some of them have lost their horses, they'll soon find themselves new mounts to ride into battle. If some have fallen, others who are younger and stronger will take their place."

Anticipate the Difficulties That the Future Will Bring

Expectation was in the air as I paused for effect. "Right now," I said, "I'm worried about the future. Winter's advancing against us, and though many of us have tents for ourselves, we have little shelter for our horses, our servants, and the great mass of our soldiery. As for food, we've eaten up most of the spoils that have fallen into our hands so far, and everywhere the people of the land have hidden their supplies away in places that we'll never find. Where is the warrior, however brave, who can win a long war with cold and hunger? If we want to go forward, we must capture all the enemy's fortresses and secure the provisions inside."

Syazarees suddenly cut into my speech. "Prince Cyrus is right," he proclaimed. "If we take their fortresses, the enemy will find themselves dispossessed. Their own territory will become a hostile land."

"Even so, Your Majesty," I said. Then I quickly added, "Some of you allies probably dread the thought of garrison duty far from home. You shouldn't. We Persians will capture the fortresses that are the most difficult to occupy, while—if King Syazarees agrees—it will be for you Medes to take the land on the frontier between Assyria and your own territory and put it under the plow. If we Persians can hold the fortresses close to Babylon, your peace won't be

disturbed in these outlying parts.”

At this the whole assembly got to their feet to express their agreement, and even Syazarees rose from his throne. Both Mandarus and Gobryas offered to fortify a post if the allies wished, thus providing the two initial cities for our strength and refuge.

Assured of the general consent to my proposals, I said, “If we really wish to win through to victory, we have to prepare battering rams and siege engines.”

Syazarees’ behavior was becoming more favorable by the moment, and he agreed to provide a siege engine at his own expense, while Mandarus and Gobryas made themselves responsible for a second, Tigranes the Armenian for a third, and I promised to furnish two more.

Of course, everyone understood that all this effort wouldn’t be finished overnight, so I encamped my troops in the healthiest spot I could find and strengthened the natural defenses of the place. This garrison would always be secure, though I myself might be away with the main body of my troops. I also questioned those natives who knew the country best, and on the basis of what they told me, I kept leading my men out to forage, securing as many supplies as possible and keeping the men at the height of their powers.

Technical Innovations Are Crucial to Victory

So I spent my days, and in the meantime, deserters from Babylon were coming over with the same story. They said that the Assyrian king had left Babylon and gone off to Lydia, the land of his ally Croesus, taking with him stores of gold and silver and all kinds of riches and treasures.

Most of the deserters thought that he had hidden his riches out of fear, but I understood that he must have gone to raise more foreign troops to face us. So I pushed my preparations forward ever more vigorously, feeling certain that another battle was going to be fought. I increased my Persian cavalry still more, getting the horses partly from the prisoners that we took during our raids and partly from my allies. There were two gifts that I would never refuse—strong horses and weapons of superior steel.

For the first time I reinforced my army with captured chariots. To these I made certain modifications, and fitted them with larger wheels to resist the shock of collision. I also lengthened their axles on the principle that a broad base is firmer than a short one.

At my command, the chariot driver’s seat was modified to resemble a small turret, stoutly built of timber and reaching up to elbow height, leaving the driver room to manage the horses above the rim. Each driver was to fight fully armored, with only his eyes uncovered.

As for the chariots themselves, I decreed that iron scythes two feet long be attached to the axles on either side, and I had scythes placed under the axle

tree, pointing to the ground, for use in a charge. Such was the improved chariot that I contrived.

Besides the chariots I also gathered a large number of war camels, collected from my friends or captured from the enemy. If nothing else, they'd serve to frighten the enemy's horses—provided they didn't terrorize our own mounts first!

BOOK XII

TO CHANGE THE WORLD

I decided to send a spy into Lydia to follow the movements of the Assyrian brute and his rich ally Croesus, and I considered my Median kinsman Rاساس the right man for the job.

Recently Rاساس's name had fallen into disrepute, for he had been overwhelmed by his love for a lady from Susa named Pantheia, the supremely beautiful wife of a warrior allied with the Assyrian king. We had captured her earlier in the campaign, at a time when her valiant husband, Abadice, was away on a diplomatic mission.

Rاساس had gone half mad trying to make Pantheia love him in return, but her loyalty to her husband never wavered, not for an instant. According to the lady herself, when she kept refusing his advances Rاساس had threatened her with violence. When her accusation became known in the ranks, the men branded Rاساس a villain.

I shared in the blame for this situation, for it was I who had thought Rاساس a good choice to be the lady's protector. When it came time for me to intervene directly with Rاساس, I sent for him and welcomed him without censure, for his features were already twisted by his sense of shame.

"Take comfort," I told him. "Wiser men than you have made themselves fools for love. I myself—"

Rاساس broke in with these words, "Oh, Cyrus, you're always patient with human failings, but the rest of the army has rejected me like a rabid dog. As soon as the troops got wind of my weakness for this lovely woman, everyone who dislikes me was pleased, and even my friends said I should kill myself since I'd betrayed my ties of blood to you by creating such a scandal."

Salvage Good from Evil

"Now listen, Rاساس," I commanded, "for I know a way to salvage something good from your misfortune. In fact, you have a chance to do both me and your harsh comrades a great service."

"If only that were possible!" said Rاساس. "I'd do anything to restore my reputation, if only for your sake."

"Then answer me this: What if you went over to the enemy and told them that you had fled from my fury? Do you think you could get them to believe you?"

"I'm sure I could!" exclaimed Rاساس. "Even my own friends would think I'd run away!"

"Yes," I agreed, "and so much the better. Then you could report back to me with what you learn about the enemy's plans and operations."

"I'm ready to leave right now!" said Rاساس in great excitement. "Everyone will think that I deserted just in time to escape being punished by you."

Following my particular weakness, I couldn't resist ribbing him about his tormented affection for the comely wife of Abadice. "Then you can really bring yourself to leave Pantheia's side?"

"Yes, Cyrus," he answered, "I can, with all my heart. You see, my suffering has taught me that I possess not one soul but two. If I had only one soul, how could my love for Pantheia be noble and base at the same time? No, it's clear to me that I have two souls. When my good soul has the upper hand, all my thoughts and acts are pure; but when my evil soul takes over, my love turns into a selfish and shameful thing. Right now my good soul is winning the battle because you've found a way to save me from the power of evil."

"Excellent," I said, "but if you're determined to go, you'd better leave at once and philosophize along the way."

Rاساس laughed wildly, as though he no longer had a care in the world. In fact, I was sending him on a very dangerous mission, and I was eager to brief him. I finished my instructions by saying, "So find out as much as you can about the enemy's plans, and be just as sure to give them false information about what we're up to. You can trick them by saying that we're going to attack their territory at a place not yet decided, for this will tempt them to scatter their forces."

"I'll try my best to tie their stomachs in knots," Rاساس put in.

"Remember to stay within the enemy's ranks," I added, "until the last possible moment, since information about their actions during the final stage of their march against us is the most important intelligence you can bring me."

We embraced once more as kinsmen and shared a prayer as I sent Rاساس on his way.

Reap the Rewards of Compassion

As soon as Pantheia heard the rumor that Rاساس had run away, she sent a messenger to me, saying, "Prince Cyrus, please don't be tempted to grieve over Rاساس. I'll bring you a far better friend than your untrustworthy cousin if you let me send for my husband, Abadice of Susa. I'm certain that he'll come to us with all the power at his command. It's true that the old king of Assyria was my husband's friend, but the new king tried to take me away from Abadice, and my husband deeply resents his tyranny. Abadice would gladly join forces with such a man as you."

I gave Pantheia permission to contact her husband. When Abadice read the letter from his wife, he set out for my camp at once with a thousand horsemen in his train. When he came to the Persian outposts he asked to see me. Instead, I gave orders that Abadice should be taken to Pantheia immediately.

So husband and wife, whose chances for reunion had long seemed dim, were in each other's arms again. When she spoke of the sympathy that I had shown her, Abadice exclaimed, "Tell me how I can repay Cyrus for his great deed!"

She answered, "My dear husband, all you really need to do is treat him as he's treated you."

Abadice came to my tent and, taking me by the hand, said, "Cyrus, in return for the kindness you've shown me and Pantheia, I'll be your friend, your servant, and your ally. Tell me what you require of me, and I'll do it."

"I'm very happy to accept your allegiance, Abadice," I said, "but for the moment I only want you to be with your wife. During all those weeks without you she was in a constant state of desperation, so for now you must stay by her side."

Since men always long to be ordered to obey their own hearts, Abadice thanked me and hurried back to Pantheia. A few days later, when he saw how much attention I was paying to the scythe-bearing chariots, he vowed to equip a hundred chariots for me out of his cavalry. He actually outdid me, offering to lead this new force in a four-poled chariot drawn by eight horses with chest plates of bronze.

In turn, his four-poled chariot gave me the idea of constructing a tall contraption for transporting the siege towers and their battering rams, one with eight poles drawn by eight yokes of oxen. I felt that several of these towers would decimate any enemy force that approached them.

I ordered one such tower to be constructed with walls and covered platforms, so that it could carry twenty men in relative safety. When the whole thing was assembled, I tested it and found that the eight yokes of oxen could pull the whole tower with less strain than one yoke could pull the average weight of a baggage cart. Satisfied, I ordered five towers to be built on the same model.

As our preparations for the great battle went on, ambassadors arrived from India with gifts for me and a message from their king. "Greetings to Prince Cyrus, the man most loved by the gods," began the translation. "Accept these gifts as a sign of my friendship, and if you need more wealth, only say the word and it shall be yours. I have told my men to place themselves under your command, and they have promised to serve you just as they would serve me."

Put Your New Allies to the Test

I made a great show of admiring the jewels, rugs, and gilded furniture that the

king of India had given me. Then I told his ambassadors that I needed three of them to help me fool the enemy. “Those of you who volunteer,” I said, “will go to the Assyrian and convince him that your king wants to make an alliance with him, not me. Then he’ll take you into his confidence. When you’ve counted his strength and sorted out his plans, come back and tell me everything. If you serve me well, I’ll be deeply in your debt, and I’ll give you and your king even greater gifts than you’ve given me.”

Three of the Indians volunteered at once, and the next day they set off on their journey.

Meanwhile my men and I continued our preparations for war on an apocalyptic scale. Through God’s grace I was able to act as a living source of inspiration. Everyone worked hard to surpass his comrades in horsemanship and spearmanship and archery, as well as in courage and endurance.

I would often lead my generals out to the chase and honor those who killed the biggest prey. I enhanced the ambition of my officers by praising all who improved the fitness and efficiency of their men. At every sacrifice and festival I held games and contests in all the martial arts, and I awarded rich prizes to the victors.

The whole army was filled with enthusiasm and confidence. The men were my shining heroes, and I rejoiced in their presence, knowing that victory would always be theirs, whatever fate befell my own person on the battlefield.

By this time almost everything was in readiness for the campaign. My new Persian cavalry numbered over ten thousand horsemen, and the scythed chariots were complete, a hundred of my own and a hundred that Abadice of Susa had manufactured. In addition there were a hundred of the old Median chariots that I had persuaded Syazarees to remodel on my design. The camels were ready also, with each of the ungainly animals carrying two archers.

After a few more weeks the Indian ambassadors returned with their report. The Assyrian brute, as it turned out, had resigned his command as the enemy army’s general-in-chief. Replacing him was Croesus, king of Lydia. Croesus had pushed through a resolution calling on all of the Assyrian’s allies to raise enormous sums for the war, largely to increase the numbers of troops who would march against us.

Be Frank About the Challenges Ahead

Working to maximize the size of his new command, Croesus’s agents were scouring the territories of the western Mediterranean and the Near East for new recruits. Masses of Thracians, armed with short swords, had already been enrolled. An army of Egyptians was coming by sea, amounting—according to the Indians—to 120,000 men, and they were armed with long shields reaching to their feet, huge spears, and shining sabers.

Beyond these, an army was expected from Cyprus, and already present

with the enemy were Cilicians, Phrygians, Paphlagonians, Cappadocians, Arabians, Phoenicians—plus all of the army of the Assyrian brute, who had taken to calling himself the king of Babylon. In addition, nearly all the Greek colonists on the west coast of Asia Minor had been forced to come to the aid of Croesus and the Assyrian. Croesus had also sent ambassadors to Sparta to propose an alliance. It seemed that most of the known world had joined to frustrate my ambitions.

Such was the news, and now was the time to act quickly to prevent the demoralization of my army. I refused to let our camp fill up with faces clouded over by fear. I tried to prevent my men from forming into gossiping groups where they would anxiously discuss the reports of the enemy's growing strength. Nevertheless, rumors flew, and it was up to me to replace them with hard facts and encouraging words.

I called an immediate meeting of my officer corps, and I let it be known that any of the rank and file who wished to hear my words would be welcome to come and listen as well.

As I foresaw, the entire army turned out, almost to a man. "My friends and allies," I began, "I'll make no secret of why I've called you here. It's to keep you from being intimidated by the news about the enemy, who now possesses a multitude of new troops to bring against us."

Emphasize the Strength of Your Own Cohorts

The army lay before me like a massive animal. My first remarks were greeted by total silence, so it was easy to broadcast my voice to every soldier and interpreter. I continued, "I want you to realize that this is a normal part of warfare—and to remind you that our own numbers are far larger now than when we thrashed the enemy before. Think, too, of how much better supplied we are now. Those of you who are tempted to be frightened at this hour—let me ask how you'd feel if you learned that a force exactly like our own was marching against you? What if you knew that warriors who had once put us to flight were advancing again, along with a horde of others—a thousand times as many?"

"Suppose you heard that the very men who had beaten your infantry were this time coming not on foot but on horseback, each man armed with a stout spear, ready to press the attack into your flesh? Suppose you heard of chariots of an entirely new kind—not there to remain stationary, standing with their backs turned to the foe as though ready to retreat, but real offensive weapons with the horses shielded by armor, and the axles fitted with sharp scythes, so that they can charge straight into your own ranks with shocking results?"

I realized that I was breaking my own rule of keeping my speeches short, but I couldn't stop the flow of my words. "And suppose you heard that your old conquerors now had camels to ride on—each one of which would terrify a

hundred horses—and that this frightening army was bringing up towers on wheels to rain down hundreds upon hundreds of arrows and javelins? If you heard all these things about the enemy that you soon had to face, how would you feel then?”

King Croesus, I went on to say, has been chosen to serve as the enemy’s commander—Croesus who fled the last battlefield on a racehorse with a sense of doom to serve as his spurs! “What’s more, we’ve learned that the enemy didn’t feel up to the task of facing you alone, so he’s hired mercenaries to fight for him, little men who are only there for the money or because they’ve been forced to serve against their will. I can only say, gentlemen, that if anyone imagines that we’re going to be defeated by such an enemy, he had better leave us now.”

According to the plan that we had discussed earlier, my favorite general Kryzantos stood up to add more. He said, “For weeks now, everyone in the army had been in high spirits. Everyone believed that a second and final victory over the enemy would be easier to win than the first.

“By now,” Kryzantos continued, “the army can see the bright side of the matter, and we’re looking forward to attacking Croesus’s own rich province of Lydia—and going home with more booty than we ever imagined possible.”

I immediately accepted the suggestion that our best course would be to take the initiative by invading Lydia, and I agreed with several other speakers that we might be able to get there before Croesus himself had time to learn of our plans and returned to defend his homeland.

Seek Additional Suggestions from Your Subordinates

Then I spoke to the men about how best to prepare for the long march ahead. When I issued the general orders that would govern our movement toward Lydia, I asked anyone who thought I’d left anything out to consult with me immediately after the assembly.

No sooner had I dismissed the men than six officers came forward with useful suggestions for refining my orders. At the same time, the rank and file quickly formed themselves into a huge beehive of purposeful activity. They surprised even me by being ready to commence the march after only two more days.

Syazarees decided to stay behind with a third of his cavalry to defend Media. He even blessed me in front of the entire army just before we set out for Lydia. Despite my mistakes, I’d actually managed to regain his trust, a task that I’d once considered impossible.

I pushed the army forward with all possible speed, keeping my cavalry in the vanguard and constantly sending explorers and scouts out ahead to high places where they could observe the enemy. Seventeen days passed before one keen-eyed scout spotted smoke. It came, as I soon learned, from the campfires of Croesus.

Had I hoped to reach Lydia before the enemy? That point was of no particular interest to me, for what I required above all was a decisive battle, and Lydia would fall all the faster after such a battle had been won by my forces. So I praised God, and I looked forward to the climax with calm nerves and high hopes.

As there were signs of a substantial body of enemy cavalry on the plains before us, I sent off a detachment from my bodyguard, ordering them to gallop to the place where Croesus's troopers seemed to be headed, and to wait there quietly.

"We have ten scouts down there," I told the chosen members of my guard, "so you must help them escape from harm's way."

Then I called out the name of Hestifer and ordered him to ride out with a thousand of his own cavalry and let the enemy troopers see him suddenly, face-to-face. "However, don't pursue them out of sight, Hestifer, and come back as soon as you've driven them off. Also, if any of the enemy ride up with their right hands raised, welcome them as friends."

Hestifer went off and got under arms, while the detachment from my bodyguard galloped to their assigned position. Before they reached the scouts, an unexpected visitor surprised them with his sudden reappearance.

BOOK XIII

THE CLASH OF ARMS

It was none other than my Median cousin, the onetime guardian of the great beauty from Susa. When the news reached me, I rode out to meet Rاساس and clasp his hand. My officers, of course, were utterly astonished until I said, “Gentlemen, our best friend has come back to us, and it’s time for you to learn about his secret mission. In spite of what you’ve heard, Rاساس wasn’t guilty of any real crime and he didn’t run away. He left because I sent him to spy on the enemy, and I’ve no doubt he’s come back with some very important information for us.”

When the truth sank in, all the officers crowded around Rاساس and took him by the hand and welcomed him back. Then I spoke again, saying, “Enough, my friends, Rاساس has vital news, so let’s hear it. Tell us the truth, Rاساس, and don’t be tempted to understate the power of the enemy.”

“In order to get an accurate sense of their numbers,” Rاساس said, “I managed to be present at the marshaling of their troops.”

“Then you can tell us not only their numbers but also the way they plan to fight.”

Immediately Debrief an Important Source of Intelligence

“That I can, Prince Cyrus. They cover about five miles and they’re drawn up thirty deep—infantry and cavalry alike—all except the Egyptians.”

“And the Egyptians?” I asked. “How are they drawn up?”

“The Egyptians,” Rاساس answered, “are drawn up in masses of ten thousand under their own officers. They’re a hundred deep and a hundred wide. They say that’s the formation they always fight in. Croesus, however, was reluctant to let them have their own way, wishing to outflank you as much as possible.”

He’d better take care, I thought, or his pincer movement will collapse. Then we’ll see who can turn a flank, and who retreats in panic.

After picking Rاساس’s brains for more details, I turned to my officers and said, “Gentlemen, it’s time for you to make a final inspection of your weapons and your harnesses. If you don’t see to every detail—no matter how minor—you might reduce your power to harm the enemy, so make sure every man checks his equipment with the utmost care. Early tomorrow morning, while I’m offering sacrifice, eat your breakfast and give your steeds their feed, so

that you'll be completely ready when the moment comes to strike. At that point, don't make anything but minor adjustments."

In the morning, while I joined the priests in offering sacrifice, the men armed themselves in their bright tunics, splendid breastplates, and gleaming helmets. All the horses wore chest plates; the chargers also carried armor on their shoulders, and the chariot horses were armored on their flanks. Under a bright, late autumn sun, the whole army flashed with bronze and steel.

The entrails of the sacrificial victims promised success, and the army was drawn up precisely in the order that I'd fixed for the battle. I had scouts posted ahead, one behind the other, and then I called the officers together for my final words of instruction and encouragement.

Know When to Fortify Your People with Praise

"Gentlemen, my friends and allies, the sacred signs are just as they were on the day of our first victory, and everything is conspiring to make today's success complete. We've worked together as brothers, building mutual trust and loyalty over a period of many months, while the enemy—men from all lands who've been thrown together overnight—have only their individual interests at heart. As soon as we shatter their confidence, they'll be up and away, flinging their weapons aside as they flee."

I paused and rested my voice for a moment so that I could finish with vigor. "Remember," I began anew, "that you've met and defeated the mass of their infantry before. As for the Egyptians, their country has long been protected by deserts on all sides, and they may have forgotten the finer points of warfare, if they ever knew them at all. They can barely see over their huge shields, and they're drawn up a full hundred deep. Their awkward formation means that only a few of them at a time will be able to fight hand to hand with our own forces. If they think they're going to push us back with their weight—well, they're going to have to withstand our steel and our steeds first. Any Egyptian formation that does manage to hold firm is going to be hit by the archers and javelin throwers in our lofty towers, which can move quickly across the battlefield like giants spreading terror."

When that message was carried down the line, each of the towers' crews cheered wildly in their turn, heartening us all.

"If you think I've neglected anything important," I added, "you've still got time to tell me. As for you officers, just make sure to show how fearless you are to your men, and give them the same words of encouragement that I'm giving you."

So I set forth with Kryzantos on my right at the head of the cavalry and my general Arsamas on the left with the infantry. I rode just in front of the standard bearer, who was carrying a long and heavy spear shaft topped by a golden eagle with outspread wings. The eagle rose to such a height that it

could be seen all over the battlefield. As we started I sent an order down the lines. Over and over I could hear it being repeated. “Keep your eyes on the standard, and march steadily on to meet the enemy.”

Analyze Your Opponent’s Movements with Utmost Concentration

When we had gone two miles or more, we observed the enemy advancing. I knew that Croesus could see how much he outflanked my forces on either side, so I wasn’t surprised when he halted his center and pushed out a column on both his right wing and his left, preparing to fall upon our flanks and close a circle of annihilation around us.

Though I was well aware of his intentions, I led my forces straight on as before, noticing that the turning point where the Assyrians had pushed out on either flank was very far from their center. I motioned to Kryzantos, and when he rode up beside me I said, “Do you see where they’ve fixed their angle?”

“I do,” answered Kryzantos crisply, “and I’m surprised by it. Aren’t they drawing their forces too far away from their center?”

“Just so,” I agreed, “too far from their center and too far from our center as well.”

“Why are they doing that?”

“Clearly,” I said, “they’re afraid we’ll attack when their wings are in touch with us but their center is still some way off.”

“How do they think they’re going to support each other at such a distance?” asked Kryzantos.

“As soon as their wings are opposite our flanks,” I predicted, “they’ll wheel around and advance at once on every side, to make us fight everywhere at once.”

“Will that be a wise move on their part?”

“It’s a natural enough plan,” I said, “given what they’ve seen of us so far, but if Croesus had understood our full strength, he’d have confronted us in a single column.”

I called out to Arsamas, “Keep advancing with the infantry, taking your pace from me!”

Speaking again to Kryzantos, I said, “March beside Arsamas with the cavalry, step for step. I’m going to head straight for their angle myself, and that’s where the battle’s going to begin. When I reach that point and my personal command is on the verge of action, I’ll start the paean and you must step up your pace. You’ll know when we’ve closed with the enemy, for the din of the battle will be deafening. At the same moment I’ll have our heavy chariots dash out against them. Your job is to follow, keeping as close to the chariots as possible. Thus we’ll fall on the enemy when he’s most confused. With God’s help, I’ll soon rejoin you, cutting my way through the enemy as

fast as I can.”

Then I sent the watchword down the lines; it was “God our Guide.” As I passed between the chariots and the cavalry, I shouted, “My men, your proud looks are everything I could ask for!” To others I sang out, “Now is the moment to prove ourselves true warriors and true brothers!”

Strengthen Your Composure at the Moment of Crisis

Suddenly Croesus had the signal raised for his center to halt and swing around. Then he ordered a charge, and so three columns advanced against me, one facing my front and one on either flank. I could feel a tremor run through my whole army. For the moment, it seemed that we were completely enclosed, with the forces of the enemy on every side except the rear.

Nonetheless, the instant I gave the word, my army wheeled around to face the foe. There was deep silence through the ranks as they realized what was coming. When the moment was ripe, I started the battle hymn, and it thundered through my entire host.

As soon as the hymn died away, the war cry rang out to the God of Battles, and I swooped forward at the head of my cavalry, straight for the enemy’s flank. Quickly we closed, while the infantry followed us at speed, wave upon wave, sweeping out on either side and far outflanking the enemy. As I’d predicted, Croesus’s formation deprived most of his men of the chance to engage our forces, but we, in our thin but highly maneuverable lines, were free to attack everywhere.

After a short struggle, Croesus’s ranks broke and fled headlong before us. The commander of my camel corps, seeing that my men and I were attacking with might and main, hurled his beasts forward as I had ordered. Even at a distance the enemy’s horses couldn’t face the camels. Mad with fear, the horses galloped off in terror, rearing and falling foul of one another.

At the same moment our scythed chariots, under the command of our new ally Abadice of Susa, dashed in, right and left, so that many of Croesus’s horsemen, fleeing from the camels, were butchered by the blades. The enemy’s own chariots fled before ours, rarely pausing even to rescue their own fighting men.

Jubilant in the power of the chariots under his command, Abadice shouted, “Follow me, comrades!” and drove straight at the enemy, lashing his steeds forward till their flanks were bloody. Abadice plunged on through the enemy cavalry, straight into the main body of the Egyptians. His brothers-in-arms charged with him; but my own charioteers, when they saw the solid ranks of the Egyptians standing firm, swung around and pursued the fleeing chariots of the enemy.

When the Shock of Attack Is Absorbed by a Powerful Foe

Tragically for Abadice and his companions, their attack failed to open a single alley through the deep Egyptian lines, and they could only charge the spears of the enemy soldiers where they stood, overthrowing them by the combined weight of horses and chariots, and crushing them beneath the hoofs and wheels. Where the scythes caught them, the Egyptians were cut to shreds.

War is ruled by a harsh and terrible god. In the midst of this indescribable confusion, with our chariots rocking among the weltering mounds of the enemy, Abadice and some of his comrades were thrown out among the Egyptians. There, like true warriors, they made their last stand, and there they were slaughtered and died.

I had grossly underestimated the strength of the Egyptians. My Persians, pouring in after them, dealt destruction where Abadice and his men had charged and shaken the ranks, but elsewhere the Egyptians, still largely unscathed, moved steadily ahead.

A desperate struggle with lance, spear, and sword was the inevitable sequel. The Egyptians had the advantage and, because of their great numbers and their fearsome weapons, were able to stay on the offensive. Their spears were immensely stout and long, and their huge shields—which were slung from their shoulders—gave more protection than our breastplates and bucklers.

Shield locked into shield, the Egyptians churned their bloody way forward, and my Persian infantry—with their light shields borne on the forearm only—couldn't drive them back. Though my men tried to exchange blow for blow, they were forced to give ground. Fortunately, their retreat gradually brought them under the cover of two of our towers, so that a second and third shower of blows from our archers, javelin throwers, and slingers fell on the Egyptians from above. I could hear the hair-raising clamor of weapons clashing and projectiles whirring and maddened warriors screaming well before I arrived on the scene.

There was an overpowering stench of opened veins and mangled guts as I stained my sword with Egyptian blood. The sight of my Persians falling back scorched my brain—the brain that had betrayed me by ridiculing the strength of the Egyptians in front of the entire army.

Suddenly I realized that I could check the enemy's advance quickest by attacking their rear, and there I dashed, commanding my troopers to follow, and we took them by surprise. Seeing what was happening, some of the Egyptians cried out that the enemy had taken them from behind, and they wheeled around to face our swift swords.

At this point everything dissolved into chaos. An Egyptian fell under my horse, and as the hoofs struck him he stabbed it in the stomach. As my charger reared up, I was thrown down.

Salvation Comes from Dedicated Followers

With a terrible cry at my plight, my men dashed forward, fighting to save me with added ferocity. Ready to sacrifice his life to save mine, one of my squires leaped down from his seat and set me, unhurt, on his own charger. Drawing back for a moment from the battle, I saw that the Egyptians had lost their momentum and ground to a halt. By now both Kryzantos and Hestifer had come up with their horsemen, and a third tower was being drawn by its oxen into range of the Egyptians.

For the moment I refused to let my generals launch a new attack against the Egyptian formation, but I ordered the archers and javelin throwers in the towers to harry these ferocious foes. I climbed one of the towers to view the entire battlefield, eager to determine how many of the enemy were still resisting the fury of my men.

What I saw was a huge chaos of flying horses, men, and chariots, pursuers and pursued, conquerors and conquered, and among the enemy only the Egyptians were still unmoved by terror. These warriors had formed themselves into a defensive circle behind a ring of steel, raising their enormous shields in mostly futile attempts to ward off our projectiles. Their bodies were covered with blood, the earth beneath their feet was a bloody paste, and their suffering was a sickening sight to behold.

Could I consign such brave men to such a horrible death? No, I could not. I ordered my forces to call off the attack, refusing to let another soldier wield a sword or launch a projectile against them.

The message that I sent the Egyptians during the cease-fire contained the praise that they deserved. Of all the forces under Croesus, I wrote, only they had fought well that day. The cowardly conduct of their allies, on the other hand, represented a betrayal of their trust. Did they wish to be cut to pieces for the sake of those who had abandoned them—or to preserve their own lives and still keep their reputation for courage?

Negotiation Can Work Better Than Naked Force

They replied with their own questions, “How is it possible to save our lives and be praised for bravery at the same time? How can our honor survive our surrender to you?”

“Betray none of your former comrades,” I answered, “and you will still have a good claim to honor, but you must surrender your arms to us and become our friends.”

“If we do surrender,” they wondered, “how will you deal with us?”

“With good faith,” I answered, “knowing that you will reward us with good faith in return.”

Rightly, they wanted me to be more specific about what they would win by their capitulation. I was quick to offer them—as long as the war lasted—better pay than they’d received from Croesus. When peace came, I promised that they would share with me in the riches of empire.

They asked me if I would exempt them from serving against Croesus and his Lydian army. Croesus, they said, was the only leader who knew them well; as for Croesus’s allies, the Egyptians had no scruples about fighting against them. Coming to terms, both the Egyptian commander and I swore to honor our agreement.

By the time that we’d concluded our peace, darkness had already fallen, and I drew my army away from the carnage of the battlefield and encamped at a place called Thymbara. Then my men and I ate, posted our pickets, and laid down to rest. In the meantime Croesus and his army fled to the shelter of his rich capital Sardis, while most of his allies had scattered over the countryside, waiting for morning to get their bearings and begin their lonely journeys home.

Shortly after dawn I marched my army straight toward Lydia. Nine days later, when I arrived on the plain in front of Sardis, I set up my siege engines and got out my ladders.

The following night I secretly sent a party of Persians and Chaldeans to climb the fortifications of Sardis at the steepest point. Their guide was a countryman of mine who had once served as a slave in Croesus’s garrison. He had sought me out to declare that he knew a hidden way down to the banks of the river that would give us access to the city.

When the guide proved as good as his word, I rushed as many of my Persian and Chaldean infantry as I could through this gap in the city’s defenses. As soon as they took the heights of Sardis, all the Lydians fled from their places on the walls and went into hiding. At daybreak I entered the city and gave orders that not a single one of my soldiers was to stray from his duty station.

Croesus, who had barricaded himself inside his palace, was crying out for me to come and negotiate with him. I surrounded his refuge with a strong guard while I went to inspect the captured citadel. There I found that, though my Persians had kept perfect discipline, my Chaldeans—new additions to my army from the province around Babylon—had ignored my orders and rushed down to pillage the town.

Respond Immediately to Renegade Actions

Instantly I summoned the Chaldean officers and told them to gather their unruly men and march away from Sardis immediately. “I will never allow,” I told them, “undisciplined troops to seize the best spoils. Don’t be surprised if, on your way home, you encounter a squadron of calvary that has an argument

to settle with you.”

The Chaldeans begged me to control my anger, promising that their men would give back all the booty they had taken.

“I have no need of those goods myself,” I rumbled, “but if you wish to calm down, hand them over to the Persians who stayed and guarded the citadel as commanded.” Here again I would demonstrate the truth that, in my army, discipline always brings rewards. The Chaldeans quickly fulfilled my desire, and my faithful Persians received some unexpected valuables.

I ordered my troops to encamp in the most suitable quarter of the town and told them to stay at their posts and breakfast there. That done, I gave orders for the Lydian king to be brought before me.

When he came into my presence, Croesus sang out, “Hail, Prince Cyrus, my lord and master! So I salute you, for the gods themselves have given you that title.”

The fallen king was bald as a pumpkin but seemed remarkably unperturbed. His eyes were bright, and his movements suggested a high degree of self-possession.

“Hail to you likewise,” I answered, “for we are both men, and neither of us is a god. Tell me now, would you be willing to advise me as a friend?”

Persuade the Defeated to Help You Consolidate Your Success

“Gladly—and more than gladly,” said Croesus, “I will help you all I can.”

“Listen, then. My soldiers have worked hard and faced many dangers, and now they hold the wealthiest city in all Asia, after Babylon. If I don’t offer them some reward, I’m likely to lose their loyalty. Yet I refuse to give Sardis over to plunder, for my soldiers would probably destroy the city entirely, and I’m aware that the worst villains in the ranks snatch up the richest rewards when armies turn to plunder.”

Croesus answered as I’d hoped he would, saying, “The only way to save this situation is for me to send word to my people. I’ll tell them you’ve promised me that Sardis won’t be sacked and that their women and children won’t be sent away as slaves. In return my people will follow my orders and bring out the richest prizes in the city. If I can announce such terms, every treasure in Sardis will belong to you and your men by tomorrow.”

“Excellent plan,” I congratulated him, “and one that holds great advantages for everyone. If you had forced us to sack Sardis, we’d have destroyed its artisans and their supplies and made it impossible for the city to recover. If the people obey your instructions, only one short year from today Sardis will again be overflowing with wealth and beauty.”

Croesus bowed and said, “First you can empty my own treasuries. Let your guards take some of my own men with them and start today.”

Words of consent quickly came from my mouth. Though I'd never trust him completely, Croesus was still a man I could do business with.

BOOK XIV

ON THE WINGS OF VICTORY

I turned to leave, but Croesus stopped me with a hand on my elbow. “A personal word before you go?” he asked.

“Of course,” I replied.

“I’m a devotee of the god Apollo, and I’ve often asked his oracle in Delphi of the Greeks what I should do next. Are you aware of this?”

I nodded that I’d heard as much.

“When I was a young man,” he continued, “I longed to father many sons, so I sent my messengers to Delphi and asked the god if my prayers would be answered. Apollo assured me that I would have sons. What he didn’t tell me was that one would be born dumb and the other would die young.”

“I’m very sorry to hear these things,” I told Croesus.

He didn’t acknowledge my sympathy. Staring off into space, he said, “In the midst of my sorrows, I sent the god another question, asking him for the only blessing that could still save me. I begged him to tell me how to overcome my pain and live in happiness for the rest of my days.”

“And what did the god say to that?”

Now Croesus looked me straight in the eye. “Apollo gave me simple advice, Prince Cyrus. He said, ‘Know yourself, O king, and then happiness will be yours.’ When I received that message, I finally felt comforted. The god, I told myself, was asking me to do very little and guaranteeing me happiness in return. Everyone, whether slave or sovereign, can know himself, and that’s all Apollo required of me—to know myself. I made peace with my son’s death, and when the old Assyrian king persuaded me to march against you and Syazarees, I came to no harm. When I recognized that I wasn’t fated to enjoy victory, the god let me flee, so that I might return to safety within the walls of this mighty city.”

“Then something changed your mind about your own powers,” I anticipated.

Excessive Ambition Is the Precursor of Disaster

“Yes, and here I am before you today. After the new Assyrian king announced his resignation from the command of his army, he and his allies convinced me to be their leader. They gave me wonderful gifts, and I let myself be flattered by their praise. False ambition seduced me, and I imagined that I’d become the greatest ruler in all the world. Without realizing it, I turned my face from

self-knowledge. I foresaw myself conquering you—you who descend from gods and kings, you who were taught valor and virtue in your cradle....” His voice trailed off before he meekly added, “While the first of my ancestors was probably the leader of an insurrection of slaves.”

“It’s not one’s origins that make the man,” I put in.

Croesus looked at me sharply, obviously suspecting that I’d offered him a cliché instead of real consolation. In truth, I’d been perfectly sincere—a fact he seemed gradually to grasp as he stared into my eyes. “I’m well and truly punished for being such a dimwit, but from now on,” he cried out, “I’ll hold fast to self-knowledge, and I pray that Apollo will reward me for my humility!”

Avoid Placing Your Trust in Cunning Natures

I found his entire performance disingenuous, but Croesus nevertheless continued in the same vein. Dramatically seizing me by the arm, he demanded to know if the god would accept him still. “Tell me, Cyrus, will Apollo ever bless me again?”

The fallen king of Lydia, I had to acknowledge, had hit upon a clever method of begging for mercy. “Give me time to think,” I told him. “For the moment, all I can do is promise that you’ll be reunited with your wife and children. Other than that, only one thing is certain: Your career as a warrior king is over.”

“So much the better!” Croesus exclaimed. “I’ll be content to lead a quiet life and to serve you however I can.”

This old fox, I thought, will still bear watching.

From the farce of Croesus I was forced to turn to the tragedy of Abadice and Pantheia. She recovered her husband’s body from the battlefield before it could be consumed by carrion eaters. She then carried his mutilated remains away in her own carriage to the banks of the peaceful river Pactolus, which flows across the plain below Sardis.

While her servants were digging a grave for the dead hero on a small hill, Pantheia lay down by the side of his corpse and slit her throat with a scimitar. She died quickly, bleeding out her own life on her husband’s shattered chest. When I learned of this calamity I went to the site to honor the memory of them both. I promised their spirits that I’d raise an elegant monument above their common grave, and then I came away.

In due course I ordered the army to set out from Sardis with the aim of returning to Babylon, for the Assyrian brute had again taken refuge in the great city after our victory over Croesus. Since I had no intention of returning to Sardis any time soon, I left a large force of infantry to garrison the place, and I brought Croesus along with me to help him keep his “self-knowledge” intact.

We were followed by a long train of wagons laden with Lydian riches of every kind, and Croesus presented me with an inventory of each wagon's contents.

As he handed over the inventory scrolls he said, "Use these, Prince Cyrus, to make sure that your underlings aren't holding anything back from you."

"Thank you for your effort, Croesus," I replied, "but these scrolls aren't necessary. I've given each wagon as a reward to the men who are guarding it. If they decide to steal, they'll only be stealing from themselves."

Besides their former king, I took many other Lydians with me on the march back to Babylon, allowing some to carry arms and others to ride horses and drive chariots. Any Lydian who failed to obey orders was immediately reduced to the lowest rank in the infantry.

Your People Are Your Most Precious Treasures

On the way back to Babylon I subdued the Phrygians and the Cappadocians and fought the Arabians until they agreed to accept my lordship. These successes enabled me to expand the Persian cavalry until it numbered forty thousand horsemen; and I even had horses left over to give to my allies, who now considered me rich beyond measure.

My wealth was something of a mirage, since in terms of gold I was undoubtedly the poorest emperor in the world. Nevertheless, I had developed the greatest resource on earth: At my command was a vigorous, seasoned army that respected my leadership and, thinking of me as the son of the gods themselves, would follow me anywhere.

There was immense joy in my heart as I returned to Babylon and entirely surrounded the great city with my forces. Then I rode around the walls myself, accompanied by my favorite generals and the leading officers of my allies. Having surveyed the fortifications, I prepared to lead my troops off to their encampment. At that moment, however, a deserter from inside Babylon arrived to tell me that the Assyrians intended to attack as soon as we began to withdraw.

This piece of intelligence shouldn't have surprised me, for the circuit of the city was so enormous that I'd had to thin my lines drastically in order to encircle it. No doubt I'd been stupid in ordering this maneuver, but I'd developed the superstitious belief that Babylon would fall all the sooner if I first surrounded it with the magic circle of my huge army.

Develop New Tactics on the Spur of the Moment

After I heard of the enemy's intentions, I assumed my post in the center of my

troops with my own staff officers around me and sent orders to the wings of the infantry to double back on either side, marching past the stationary center of the line, until they met in the rear exactly opposite my position under the western wall of the city.

Thus the men in front were immediately encouraged by the doubling of their depth, and those who retired were equally happy, for they now had other warriors between themselves and the enemy city. The formation continued to fold back on itself, increasing to three lines and then four. Not a single man broke and ran away from Babylon. On the flanks, the cavalry and the light infantry drew nearer and nearer to my position as the line contracted and deepened.

When the whole army stood in close order, we all backed slowly away, still facing the walls. Then we turned, marched a few paces, wheeled round again to the left, and halted. The further we got from Babylon, the less often we paused, until, judging ourselves secure, we quickened our pace and went off in an uninterrupted march until we reached our tents.

As the army settled in, I called a council of my senior officers and said, "Friends and allies, now that we've surveyed Babylon on every side, I see little chance of taking the city by assault. Its walls must be the strongest in the world, and looking up at them is like gazing upon mountains. On the other hand, over time the masses who have taken shelter inside are going to exhaust their supply of food. If none of you has any other scheme to suggest, I propose that we reduce their strength by blockade."

Then Kryzantos spoke. "Doesn't the Euphrates River flow through the middle of the city, and isn't it a quarter of a mile wide?"

"It does and it is," said Gobryas, "and the water's so deep that it would cover the heads of two men, though one stood on the other's shoulders. If anything, the city's even better protected by its river than by its walls."

"Well, Kryzantos," I said, "here's an idea about the river. Let's dig a trench all the way around Babylon. Let's make it as wide and as deep as we can, to ensure that our blockade of the city will be tight and safe. If we can't get at the Assyrians, they won't be able to get at us either."

Cover Your Stratagems with a Shroud of Secrecy

I actually had a better plan, but for the moment I vowed to share it with no one but Kryzantos, in whose discretion I had total confidence.

After taking measurements and leaving enough space on either bank of the river for a tall tower, I ordered a gigantic trench to be dug around Babylon. Then I ordered work on the towers to begin. The foundations were of palm trees, a hundred feet long and more. I laid these foundations in order to give the impression that I meant to besiege the city. Then I had other towers built around Babylon, so as to have as many guard posts as possible.

Thus I employed my army, but the Assyrians and Babylonians within the walls laughed at my preparations, shouting out that they had enough grain to last for ten years.

My good army turned itself, for the time being, into a huge band of common laborers and dug the trenches with remarkable speed. As they finished I learned that a great festival was about to be celebrated in Babylon—an occasion for the citizens to dance and carouse the whole night long.

When darkness fell on the first night of the festival, I briefed my men on what I planned for Babylon and put the engineers back to work. The mouths of the trenches were opened, and during the night the water of the Euphrates poured into them, so that the old riverbed, suddenly empty, formed a road into the center of the city.

With the flow of the Euphrates diverted, I ordered my Persian officers to bring up their thousands, horse and foot soldiers alike, each detachment drawn up two deep, with the allies to follow in their usual manner. I descended into the channel first, to see if the bottom was firm enough for marching. When I found it adequate, I called a council of all my generals.

Pick the Most Propitious Moment to Launch Your Offensive

“Tonight, my friends, we share great good fortune,” I began, “for the Euphrates River has stepped aside for us, offering free passage into Babylon. Enter her without fear, remembering that we’ve conquered these Assyrians and their allies before—when they were alert, sober, and armed to the teeth. Tonight we have the advantage of catching them drunk and off guard, and they are clueless about the fate that—God willing—is about to overtake them.”

I felt like I wanted to embrace the entire army at once, glorying not so much in the coming victory as in the thought that I’d be exposing my men to much less danger than success normally requires, especially for a prize as huge as Babylon. Still, I had to make sure that we didn’t waste our incredible advantage.

“If anyone is troubled by the thought of projectiles being launched from the rooftops when we enter the city,” I continued, “I advise you to lay these fears aside. If our enemies do climb their roofs, the god of fire will come forth to help us defeat them. Their porches are easily set aflame, for the doors are made of palm wood and varnished with bitumen, one of fire’s favorite fuels. However, you must not start a single fire unless you absolutely have to, and when the city is ours you must put out any fires that are still burning. Come, then, take your swords in hand. With God’s help, I’ll lead you on.” Turning to Mandarus and Gobryas, I added, “Show us the streets, for you know them, and once we’re inside, lead us straight to the palace of the Assyrian brute.”

“So we will,” said Gobryas, “and it wouldn’t surprise me to find the palace gates unbarred, since the whole city is drunk on wine.”

It was time to act. “Let’s attack at once,” I exclaimed, “and make Babylon our new capital!”

Quietly we entered by way of the muddy thoroughfare over which the river had flowed. We struck down the first Assyrians and Babylonians we met, but others fled into their houses. Some citizens tried to raise the alarm, but Gobryas and his men drowned out their terrified voices with louder shouts, pretending to be drunkards themselves.

Strike at the Heart of Opposing Power

We made our way by the quickest route and soon found ourselves before the Assyrian brute’s palace. Here, contrary to their expectation, the troops under Gobryas and Mandarus found the gates closed, but they rushed to attack the guards as they lay boozing around a blazing fire just outside the gates.

As the din grew louder and louder, those within the palace inevitably heard the tumult. The Assyrian king asked his attendants to see what was happening, so some of them accidentally obliged us by debarring the gates and scrambling out. Seeing the gates swing wide, Mandarus and his men darted in, hard on the heels of the Assyrian’s attendants, who turned to flee. My allies chased them at sword’s point into the presence of the doomed young king.

Mandarus and Gobryas and their men found him on his feet with his drawn scimitar in his hand. He was a big, strong man who fought for his life like a demon, but by sheer weight of numbers they overpowered him, and neither he nor any of his retinue escaped.

When my squadrons of cavalry entered the city, they warned the inhabitants to stay indoors under pain of death. For their part Gobryas and Mandarus returned to my side, first giving thanks to the gods for allowing them to take vengeance on the unrighteous king, and then kneeling to kiss my hands. They shed tears of joy and gratitude, and in the headiness of the moment I wept with them.

At dawn the remaining unconquered Assyrian soldiers learned that we had secured the city and killed the king. I persuaded them to surrender the citadel, to which I quickly sent a new commandant and garrison of my own. I then had my heralds proclaim that all the citizens of Babylon must turn over their weapons. After these were collected by my men, I had them placed in the citadel for future use.

Not so much as one part in twenty of the city had been burned during our attack. Knowing that no victory can be won without divine guidance, I summoned the Persian magi and allowed them to set aside the most magnificent spoils of Babylon as an offering to the gods. I had them mark out entire districts around the city for use as sacred precincts and priestly

property, so that they might develop a healthy stream of revenue for honoring our deities, especially God the Father Almighty.

When it came to distributing Babylon's great houses and public buildings, I gave them to the officers whom I recognized as my chief partners, with the best prizes going to the bravest and smartest men, whatever their race or nationality might be. If anyone suspected that his full worth hadn't been recognized, he was invited to come and complain directly to me. At the same time I issued a proclamation to the Babylonians, instructing them to continue in their occupations and pay their taxes and stand ready to serve the new empire.

As all this was being accomplished, I felt that the time had come to assume the style and manner of a king, but I wished this change to come about with the consent of my friends, so I developed another artful expedient.

BOOK XV

THE TEMPTATIONS OF SUCCESS

My campaign tent was still pitched in the public square that fronted the royal palace. I avoided the use of the Assyrian throne and sat down on a plain chair on my third morning in Babylon. I began receiving everyone who wanted to speak with me.

People came by the hundreds. In the struggle to gain access to my person, they offered bribes to my guards and officers. Refusing to accept a single coin, my men struggled to stop the supplicants' jostling and to keep them in reasonable order. Whenever any of my personal friends appeared, thrusting their way through the crowd, I would stretch out my hand and draw them to my side, saying, "Wait until I've finished dealing with these others, and then we can talk like we used to."

So they waited, but the multitude kept coming, growing larger and larger, and long hours passed before I found time for my friends.

Demonstrate the Disadvantages of a Faulty Procedure

"Perhaps, gentlemen, it's a little late this evening," I told my friends at day's end. "Be sure to come early tomorrow, for I'm eager to hear from all of you." Exhausted by standing and fasting all day long, my friends were happy to be dismissed.

Early the next morning I began again, but even more supplicants lined up than on the day before, and a huge mass of my new subjects had already assembled before my friends arrived. Accordingly, I had a cordon of Persian lancers stationed around me, and I ordered that no one but my inner circle be allowed to approach me.

As soon as my comrades arrived, I said, "I thank the gods for giving us Babylon, but this isn't quite what we expected, is it? If success means that a man has to give up seeing his best friends, then it's completely overrated!"

My friends looked at me in total confusion, forcing me to add, "Yesterday, as you yourselves saw, I listened to these petitioners from dawn to dusk. Today the crowd's even thicker, and they've all come to ask me favors. I scarcely know a single person among these masses of supplicants, and I think they should approach you first, my friends, in hopes of receiving an introduction to me. Indeed, I should have arranged matters like that from the start, but I've been used to war for a long time, and in war I felt like I had to keep my hands on everything. By now I feel like I deserve a little rest. Still,

I'm not sure I know how to make the transition. So let me ask for your advice."

Up rose Rspas and said, "Long ago, Cyrus, when you were a boy visiting Media, I longed to be your friend; but I saw you had no time for me, so I left you alone. Then, years later, you finally needed me to recruit the Median cavalry, urging them to join you in the hunt for the retreating Assyrians. I hoped that would make me your comrade forever, Cyrus. Well, the work was done and I won your praise—"

"More than my praise—" I began, but Rspas cut me off.

"When we gained our first true allies, the Hyrcanians, you had to curry their favor, Cyrus. Then the enemy's camp was taken, and you had no time to trouble your head with thoughts of me. The next thing I knew, Gobryas became your friend, and after him Mandarus, and it was hard for me to get a word in edgewise. Then came the alliances with the Sakians and the Cadousians, and you had to chum up to them. So there I was, back to square one. I consoled myself by thinking, 'When he's done with all this, he'll finally have some leisure for me.' Soon after that I had my problem with Pantheia. Then, at your urging, I pretended to side with the enemy, and in their camp I learned all I could and passed that information to you. You called me a hero—but now I've fallen through the cracks again."

Use the Laughter of Your Colleagues to Discipline Troublesome Followers

I let Rspas ramble on with his story. He witnessed to his continuing desperation at my neglect, and he spoke of his hope that some day I'd no longer begrudge him my time. When we took Babylon, Rspas said, he supposed that his hour had finally come.

"But yesterday," he exploded, "I had to fight my way through the crowd to reach your side! You grasped my hand and greeted me and told me to wait beside you, and I waited, standing there all day long, without a bite to eat or a drop to drink."

A harsh voice cried out, "Sounds like it's time for Rspas to get a wife!"

Then someone else rudely observed, "Sounds like he wants to be a wife himself—the queen of Babylon!"

I had to join my laughter with that of all the others, leaving poor Rspas completely disconsolate. Later, when I discovered a beautiful woman of Babylon who looked a good deal like Pantheia, I sent her to him. I understand that they were very happy together, and I saw Rspas whenever he had a new child that he wanted me to bless.

Next my favorite general Kryzantos stood up and spoke, "Cyrus, before we took this formidable city it was natural for you to spend all your time with the army. You had to use every means necessary to impress the troops, so that

everyone would be happy to share the work and the danger. But now you've won an empire, and the moment has come when you ought to have a home of your own. Yet you continue to sleep in your campaign tent! There's nothing sweeter or more sacred than a man's home. Don't you think," he added, "that we're ashamed to see you still living under cloth while we sit in our grand new houses of stone and relax by our own firesides?"

When Kryzantos had spoken thus, many others followed him, all to the same effect—and very much as I'd foreseen. So it came about that I moved permanently into the palace at Babylon. I made the traditional sacrifice to the goddess of the hearth, and afterward I sacrificed to God the Father, the one true king, and to any other gods named by the magi. Then the treasures of Sardis were brought in, making my palace the last word in luxury.

Guarantee Your Personal Security

I set about governing my capital and my empire, and I had to be concerned about the safety of my own person. Because I had subjected the city to such radical change, there was bound to be substantial hostility toward me in Babylon—substantial enough to put me at risk of assassination.

Clearly, I would need a large secret service and bodyguard. I made a list of the men whom I trusted most, men who would be willing to place my welfare even above their own families.

However, this force would hardly be sufficient to frustrate all my deadly enemies, and I wondered how best to add to its numbers. Since so many of my Persians came from impoverished backgrounds, I felt certain that they were the men who would most value life at my court. Accordingly, I selected ten thousand Persian lancers to protect the palace, night and day. They would also be with me whenever I had to travel abroad.

Babylon, I determined, must always have an adequate city guard, whether I was in residence at the palace or not; therefore, I garrisoned troops throughout the city. I would levy a tax upon the Babylonians themselves to keep their protectors paid and provisioned.

Lastly, as I pondered how to keep my entire empire intact, I decided that mercenaries alone would not be adequate to the job. I would have to retain my best and noblest warriors—the very ones who'd contributed most to my success—and I would have to ensure that they suffered no loss of their courage, strength, or skill. I called a meeting of the core members of my army, hoping to convince them that it was best to remain in my service and be ready to defend what we had won.

When all were present I began, "Gentlemen, the gods have so graced us that today we're masters of a vast territory, and the peasants of all these lands are content to support us. We have great houses of our own with exquisite furnishings to match. We are the benefactors of a law that's recognized in all

lands: When a city is captured in war, its people and all their property fall into the hands of the conquerors. What's more, it was our virtues, not our vices, that won us all that we now possess."

Success Should Never Breed Complacency

There were many signs of assent, which was natural enough given the pleasant nature of what I'd just said. Henceforth, however, I'd have to urge my warriors to practice self-restraint amid conditions of affluence that were a constant incitement to self-indulgence.

"If you ponder our situation," I said, "I think you'll discover that the danger to our proud traditions is far from over. The great temptation of conquerors is to forsake the heroic life that won them the fruits of victory and gradually slide into a life of laziness and luxury. We have to be on constant guard against this temptation. We have to keep a close watch on each other, so that we don't degenerate into greedy parasites whose first care is to serve ourselves, rather than the masses of people who now depend on us for their safety."

I struggled to find the words that would guard my elite against false leaders who denounce hard work as a bore and a bother. If we let ourselves grow soft, I warned them, we'll betray our true selves. Before long, the loss of our honor will render us impotent. If we turn our backs on the strenuous life, we'll destroy both our power and our wealth.

"It's not enough to have been courageous once," I reminded them. "No man can maintain his courage unless he cultivates it. Just as the body grows weak through laziness, the powers of the spirit—valor, readiness, temperance, and intelligence—may diminish and die. Founding an empire is a glorious achievement, but keeping it safe is even more important. To seize it may be the outcome of daring alone, but to hold it is impossible without self-restraint and forethought. Let's work harder now than ever before! Friends, we have so much to lose if we do not! Our very success means that we have to guard against envious people who long to see us poor again."

Only Those Who Serve the People Deserve to Rule the People

A palpable sense of solemnity had fallen over the assembly, and I felt that my friends were listening with the same intensity that they'd given my words on the eve of battle.

"Bear in mind," I added, "that we began this campaign to defend Syzarees, not to commit aggression or make ourselves filthy rich. The gods are with us, I say, but we have to dedicate ourselves to keeping our subjects

safe—safer than any other rulers could. We have to be willing to share heat and cold and hardship and cares with our people, and we must never complain of the burdens that we have to bear.”

My words were springing out of me as from some deep fountain within. “We should all be grateful that our dreams have come true, but we should also realize that our enjoyment of these good things is rooted in the pains that we endured to gain them. If some god were to prepare a table for us with the food we love most, and just one more touch was needed to make our happiness complete, we would have to ask for an overwhelming sense of hunger. We would have to be ravenous for the most delicious foods and parched for the finest wines.”

I paused for a moment to await my next inspiration, and in the next instant it caused me to speak. “Therefore, we must strain every nerve to work hard and keep ourselves noble. If we do, we’ll gain the deepest of all satisfactions, but if we fail we’ll suffer the bitterest of sorrows. Ask yourselves, if we become unworthy of the heroism and honor that brought us victory, what excuse will we offer for our failure? By what right can men who have gone bad punish others for badness or stupidity? By no right! So honor should be our companion to the end our days.”

“What, then, would you have us do?” an anguished voice cried out in the language of the Medes.

Honor Everyone Who Acts Honorably

“What would I have you do? You must keep your eyes on me and watch whether I am diligent in my duty, and I’ll keep my eyes on you and honor each one of you who acts honorably. We must also be careful to educate our sons and daughters when children are born to the women whom we’ve taken as wives. Striving to set the best example we can for our children will make us act even more nobly. We’re bound to be proud of the way our children turn out if they see nothing unseemly and hear nothing shameful. They, like us, will live in the light of all that’s good, and their virtue—like ours—will be their strength.”

Kryzantos took the floor after me to say, “Gentlemen, Prince Cyrus is right to stress faithfulness and discipline. We his followers have triumphed over half the world because we obeyed him; that was our greatest virtue. We were eager to follow Cyrus’ call by night and day. When we marched behind our leader, nothing could challenge our power. And Cyrus is right to say that obedience is the way to keep everything we’ve won from slipping through our fingers. We can be sure of furthering our own interests whenever we listen to Cyrus and follow his instructions.”

My liegemen, I could tell, had been taking all these words to heart. Now, I felt, the time was ripe to reveal more about their new roles.

I thanked Kryzantos and, as he sat down, I added, “This is a new world for all of us, and I need you to join your leadership skills with mine in ways that are more important now than they ever were before. Because I can’t govern our vast dominions alone, many of you will be making decisions on my behalf that will affect the entire empire. While remaining warriors, you will also become rulers. As you expect your subjects to obey you, you must in turn obey your superiors. We must be united in ruling our people, even as we were united in fighting on the battlefield.”

The Leader Must Be a Living Law

At that point I called out the names of the men whom I’d chosen to serve in my administration. I had them all by heart: receivers of revenue, controllers of finance, ministers of works, guardians of property, and superintendents of the royal household.

Casting about, I found a ready model for the organization of a governmental hierarchy in the traditional military command structure. For in the army, even when masses of men are numbered in the hundreds of thousands, not a single soldier is left without a leader. I taught my most powerful followers to adopt the same sort of hierarchical system to streamline their bureaucracies, and I helped them with organizational matters myself in order to boost their efficiency.

Most of all I vowed that my followers would learn more from my own example than from any legal code or set of regulations. As important to the people as written laws may be, the leader serves as a living law. He not only acts as a competent guide but also functions as a wise judge, detecting and punishing those who fail to serve the people with justice and honesty.

BOOK XVI

WHEN HARMONY REIGNS

All through my life I paid reverence to God because, first and last, my faith was deep and genuine. As the ruler of a mighty empire, I showed myself more eager than ever to praise and thank the Father God and the other gods, his eternal sons and daughters, beginning each day by chanting a hymn and sacrificing to whichever divinities the priests might name.

My friends made my faith a model for their own. Of course, I understood that their motives were mixed—as what human motives are not? There was, undoubtedly, a belief that their own fortunes might improve if they showed more reverence to the gods, and they knew it couldn't hurt to follow the example of someone like myself, who had been so openly blessed. At the same time, they hoped their worship would please me as much as it pleased the gods. I can't speak for the gods, but it pleased me very much.

If my friends were god-fearing, they would be less likely to sin against others—including myself. As they noticed how hard I worked to be a good leader, they would shun base actions and walk in the paths of light. Certainly, I inspired more decency in my people because I never said a shameful word to any man or woman or committed a shameful deed.

I also honored the faiths of other nations. Instituting a new order in Babylon, I found the help provided by one of the peoples who had been held captive there, the Hebrews, to be indispensable. Their leaders offered brilliant solutions to the problems I faced, and I quickly came to count them among my closest advisers.

As my debt to the Hebrews increased, I asked what I could give them in return. It was a question that they had been aching to hear. Their long “Babylonian exile,” as they called it, had been an embittering experience for this people, and most of them were eager to return to their homeland and rebuild the looted, burned-out temple of their god Jehovah, in their once beautiful capital of Jerusalem. Over fifty years had passed since the Hebrews had been enslaved by their enemies, and they felt that they had been punished enough for ignoring both Jehovah's laws and the warnings of his prophets.

I was highly pleased to come to the aid of such a spiritual people and proclaimed that their worship be reestablished. I provided them with enough funds to ensure that their new temple would surpass the glory of the old. I also restored to their possession over five thousand precious objects that had been plundered from the house of Jehovah at the time of its sacking. The Hebrews declared that the Lord had personally anointed me to fulfill his plans for a

renewal of their religious life in their old homeland, and I saw no reason to doubt them. I was honored to accept their blessing.

Let Courtesy and Self-Control Rule Your Actions

There is a deep—and usually frustrated—desire in the heart of everyone to act with benevolence rather than selfishness, and one fine instance of generosity can inspire dozens more. I experienced over and over again how my own temperance made others more temperate. When they perceived moderation and self-control in the actions of their leader, my subjects were eager to curb their own antisocial instincts.

I made my people understand the crucial difference between modesty and self-control. The modest person, I told them, will do nothing blameworthy in the light of day, but a true paragon of self-control—which we all should strive to be—avoids unworthy actions even in the deepest secrecy of his private life.

Self-restraint would take root in my friends if they recognized me as a leader who wasn't distracted from the pursuit of virtue by the pleasure of the moment—a leader who chose hard work before all else. Thus I established a stately court, where all my friends showed respect to each other and cultivated courtesy until it bloomed into perfect harmony. In my palace I never heard harsh words of anger or a burst of scornful laughter.

The martial skills of my men were kept sharp by the challenges of the hunt. I would lead my officers in the pursuit of game, which is the surest way to maintain excellence in horsemanship. No matter what the weather, we would hunt for whole days at a time. The rigors of the chase would harden my officers, keeping them vigorous in spite of cold and heat and hunger and thirst.

I would lead the hunting parties myself, unless the day's business kept me close to the palace. In that case, I would hunt in my spacious parks for the wild creatures that my gamekeepers reared. I would never sit down to my evening meal until I had exercised enough to earn it. Even my horses had to sweat before they were given their feed.

Because of this constant practice, my friends and I were always ready to respond to emergencies. As I watched the men who hunted with me, I'd single out those who performed bravely, rewarding them with high rank and seats near me at festivals, as well as gifts and honors of every kind.

These were all means to one end: To make it impossible for our subjects to regard us, their rulers, as soft and unworthy. Thus I molded the men I considered worthy of command by the training and rewards that I gave them, as well as by the dignity of my own leadership. With such techniques the peace and safety of my empire was secured.

Fringe Elements Are the Likeliest Source of

Conspiracies

There were others, however, who caused me anxiety. They were professional soldiers, and their chief loyalty was to their closest comrades, not to me. They commanded large numbers of infantry and cavalry, and many of them were confident—as I could plainly see—of their own power to rule, even of their power to rule in my place. They were men in close touch with my bodyguards, and I spoke to some of them daily, keeping them busy with their duties. I never learned to trust them entirely, and that was just as well.

How was I to prevent them from starting a revolt whose first deadly thrust might be a sword through my own entrails? I rejected the idea of stripping them of command; such an action was too likely to incite their fury. To demonstrate my distrust by refusing them admission to my presence would amount to a personal declaration of war against them.

Should I follow the methods of tyrants and have them killed in their beds during the darkest hour of the night? Unthinkable. Better that I die myself than lead a life of infamy.

But there was one method, I felt, that would work—an honorable method that would likely secure my safety. I had to win the friendship of these proud and capable men, to win their friendship and make them even more devoted to me than to their closest comrades.

Early in my career, when I had no wealth to share, I did all I could to show my affection for my commanders and my soldiers. I worked in their behalf and rejoiced in their good fortune, and I sympathized with them when they were sad. But when I became rich, I realized that no kindness between man and man comes more naturally than sharing food and drink, especially food and drink of the ambrosial excellence that I could now provide.

Wining and Dining and Bestowing Gifts to the Powerful

Accordingly, I arranged that my table be spread every day for many invitees, all of whom would dine on the same excellent food as myself. The wines we drank were truly the nectar of the gods. After my guests and I were finished, I would send out any extra food to my absent friends, in token of my esteem. I'd include anyone who'd won my approval by their work in my bodyguard, or by waiting on my person, or in any important service, letting them see that all who actively supported me would never experience neglect.

Convinced that it's impossible to feel hatred toward those who treat us with love, I never lost an opportunity to reward my warriors, even if I remained uncertain of their loyalty. My new wealth meant that I could surpass all others in the grandeur of my gifts.

The governors of my empire, I believe, benefited more than the loyal subjects of any monarch in the world, for I dressed them in rich clothing,

presented them with dazzling jewels, and gave them champion horses with golden bridles. Was this mere bribery? Perhaps, but it won the hearts of men, and it kept my empire peaceful to the benefit of everyone within its borders.

My generosity toward all who provided me with crucial information set countless people straining with eyes and ears to learn any news that might help to preserve the realm. For my part, I would listen to anyone who claimed that he had vital intelligence to convey.

A saying arose to the effect that the king has a thousand eyes and a thousand ears. Superstitious people were afraid of expressing discontent “because the Great King is sure to hear”; they were afraid of plotting to hurt me, “since the Great King himself might catch us in the act.”

Riches Are for Sharing, Not Harvesting and Hiding

One day at a dinner in Babylon, Croesus criticized me for being so openhanded, claiming that I would soon reduce myself to poverty.

I replied, “How much wealth do you think I could have amassed already, if I hadn’t shared the spoils of my empire with my friends?”

Croesus named an enormous sum.

I said, “Croesus, I’m going to use Hestifer here to put your theory to the test.”

Turning to Hestifer, I said, “Go around to my richest friends and tell them I need money for a great enterprise. Have each of them write down the amount he can give me. Then seal their letters and, when you get back, come to me with Croesus and, in my presence, hand the letters over to him.”

On the next day, Croesus lost all the color in his face when he totaled up the amount that my friends had pledged. Gasping, he exclaimed, “This sum is so much larger than anyone could ever keep for himself!”

“You see, Croesus,” I pointed out, “I do possess almost an infinite amount of wealth. Going against common sense, you’ve advised me to harvest and hide it—and be envied and hated because of it, and hire mercenaries to keep an everlasting watch over it. But I’ve decided to make my friends rich, and they’ve become living treasuries for me, and they’re better at guarding their gold than any watchmen could ever be.”

“And that is exactly why,” the downcast Croesus said, “you’ve won half the world and I’ve won no more than permission to sit at your table.” He shook his head.

Avoiding the Abuse of Money

I had something else to say. “Croesus, the lower gods have implanted something unworthy in our souls—something that makes all of us beggars at

heart. From time to time almost everyone thinks he'd like to seize all the world's riches. Even I can hear the call of that terrible greed, but I know enough to avoid the deadly curse that greed brings with it. Now tell me, what do most rich men do with their excess wealth?"

"Most rich men," Croesus got out with difficulty, running his hand over his bald head, "bury gold in the earth, and some of it never gets unburied."

"Yes," I agreed, "and what foolishness that is! Now what else do most rich men do with their money?"

"Most men count it and total it up," Croesus said, "and they set guards over it."

"So doesn't their gold cause them a world of trouble?"

"Surely," he said. "Some of them invest more time in their money than in their own children."

"Yet however rich they may be," I observed, "they can't eat more than they have room for in their stomachs—they'd burst wide open if they did! As for all their golden garments—they'd be crushed to death if they tried to wear them all at once! Their extra wealth means nothing but extra grief. For my part, I try to be faithful to the gods, and I reach out my hands toward them in supplication. When I have more than I need, I give the excess to my friends. In helping my friends, I win their love—or something quite close to it—and in return I receive gratitude, fame, and even life itself. So my earthly glory grows, and the grander it becomes, the lighter it is to bear."

Gold Is Not a God of Power and Light

"You have a gift for subtlety, Cyrus, that I never dreamed of," said Croesus. "How stupid I was to believe that riches were everything, and how inevitable it was that my illusions would one day cause my downfall." The dethroned king shook his head again. "If only I'd known what a fool's paradise I was living in!"

"So you finally realize, Croesus," I said, "that the truly contented man is not the possessor of vast riches. The crown of happiness goes to the person who has the skill to gain money fairly, use it honorably, and not mistake gold for a god of power and light."

I had still more to say to Croesus, reminding him that most people who live in good health, as I did, keep little medicine in their homes. I, on the other hand, made friends with the ablest physicians of my day. Whenever they recommended a medical instrument or a medicinal drug or a health-advancing kind of food or drink, I obtained it and had it stored in my palace.

Thus I was prepared to help when accident or illness struck my friends. With a brilliant doctor by my side, I would visit them with rare—and effective—remedies for their ailments. One of my patients was the courageous young man who saved my life when the Egyptians cut my horse out from under me

in the great battle; I helped bring him back from death's door when he was attacked by a high fever. Croesus himself was also to gain by my prudence: I eased his pain during his final illness, and now he rests in the arms of Apollo.

My subtlety served me equally well when I was confronted by other problems. In every matter needing arbitration, whether a lawsuit or a trial of skill, I made sure that the quarreling parties agreed on who would judge their case. Everyone would try to retain the services of the greatest man they knew—and the one most likely to favor their own side—and if they lost they envied their victorious opponent and hated the judge.

The winners, of course, would only shrug their shoulders and say that justice had been done. Thus the resentment that might have been heaped on my head fell instead on the judges, and frustrated litigants kept their high opinion of me in spite of their enduring sense of grievance.

Pageantry Has Its Place

The first public progress that I made along the great processional way through Babylon was a memorial event, and I used the very solemnity of the ceremony to win favor for my new government.

On the day before we marched, I summoned my officers of state—both Persian and allied—and gave them splendid Median vestments. As they received their robes I announced that I would drive my chariot to the sacred precincts and offer sacrifice in thanksgiving for all my victories.

“You will present yourselves at my gates,” I added, “before the rising of the sun. Be sure that you're attired in these robes, and take the places that my servant Pheraulas points out to you. I'll lead the way and you'll follow in your appointed order. If any of you can think of an improvement to make our procession even more impressive, will you please acquaint me or Pheraulas with it?”

I gave the most splendid robes to my highest officials. Then I brought out more colorful garments—deep purple and luminous blue, glowing green and gleaming crimson—and gave a share to each of my generals, saying, “Dress your friends with these, as I have dressed you.”

Mandarus asked me, “And you, Prince Cyrus, how will you adorn yourself?”

I answered, “If I can only do well by my friends, I'll look glorious enough in whatever clothes I wear.”

My nobles went back to their friends and passed on the wonderful clothing I sent to them. Meanwhile I summoned Pheraulas back to my side. Though a commoner, Pheraulas was a great lover of beauty. With his help I finished planning the details of the next day's royal procession.

Everything was ready before sunrise. My mounted nobility lined either side of the road leading from the palace, and no one was allowed to pass within the

lines unless he was recognized as a dignitary. In front of the palace stood the imperial bodyguard, drawn up four deep on either side of the gates, and every last man carried a lance of uniform length.

All the cavalry were there, the Persians on the right, and the allies on the left, and the chariots—without scythes—were posted in the same way, half on one side and half on the other. Presently the palace gates were flung open, and at the head of the procession came the exquisite bulls that had been chosen for the sacrifice.

Next came an offering to the Sun in the form of perfect, pitch-black stallions. Then a white chariot with a golden yoke appeared. It was decorated with garlands and dedicated to the Father God, and after it came the white chariot of the All-Seeing, and then a third chariot drawn by horses with scarlet trappings, and behind the third chariot walked a hundred muscular men carrying a massive portable hearth that blazed with a flaring sacred fire.

BOOK XVII

LEADERSHIP AND CUNNING

At last I myself appeared, coming forth from the palace gates in my royal chariot, wearing a light purple tunic and close-fitting scarlet trousers and a cloak of deep purple. I had a tiara on my head, and circling my tiara was a thin but elegant crown.

My hands hung free outside my cloak, and beside me stood a charioteer that I towered over. At my appearance every soldier present fell to his knees—something that I hadn't expected—and the fact that my Persians paid me this kind of tribute came as an unwelcome shock, so contrary was the practice to our traditional culture. I later made it clear that such a performance was never to be repeated.

As my chariot proceeded, my four thousand lancers went before it, two thousand on either side, and close behind came three hundred mounted mace bearers. Two hundred royal steeds were then led past, followed by two thousand spearmen, and after them, led by Kryzantos, came the original squadron of Persian cavalry, ten thousand men and horses, a hundred deep and a hundred abreast.

Behind the first squadron came ten thousand more Persian horsemen under Hestifer, another ten thousand under Gobryas, and yet another ten thousand under Mandarus. The Median cavalry came next, followed by the Armenians, the Hyrcanians, the Cadousians, and the Sakians; and after all the horsemen had passed there came a squadron of war chariots, drawn up four deep.

When the procession reached the sacred precincts, the sacrifices were made according to the instructions of the priests. These rites completed, I marked out a starting and a finish line, for the ground around there was suitable for racing. During much of the day the cavalry and the chariots matched their horses against each other, tribe by tribe.

Openly Reward Your Best People

Toward evening we came back to the palace and enjoyed a great feast, with Mandarus taking charge of everything. The places for the guests were chosen with care. Everyone looked to my left side to identify the man I honored most that evening, for I avoided assigning the highest place to the same guest indefinitely. The same rule applied to the other seats at my table: Anyone who excelled in my service would rise to a higher seat, while anyone who rested on his laurels would fall to a lower.

As the wine went round and round, Hestifer turned to me and said, "Would you be upset, Cyrus, if I asked you something I really need to know?"

"Highly unlikely," I answered. "In fact, I'd be troubled if you didn't."

"Tell me then: Did I ever refuse to come when you called me?"

"You? Of course not!"

"And have I ever been slow to answer your call?"

"No, never," I assured Hestifer.

"Or neglected to do anything you ordered?"

"No, not at all. I've always been happy with your service," I testified.

"Whatever you asked me to do, I always did it heart and soul, did I not?" "Absolutely."

"Then why, Cyrus, why in heaven's name have you singled out Kryzantos for a seat of honor higher than me?"

Blessed Are Those Who Take the Initiative

The question came as no surprise. "Shall I really tell you?" I asked, ready to treat Hestifer to a few questions of my own.

"Please do, my lord!"

"You won't be rattled if I tell you the plain truth?" "No, Cyrus. The truth holds no terrors for a man like me."

I had my points ready to rattle off like a catechism, so well was I acquainted with the virtues of my favorite general. "All right, Hestifer," I began, "unlike you, Kryzantos never waits to be called. He has the knack of showing up whenever I need him, and he performs not only what he's ordered to do, but also anything else he thinks will bring us closer to our goals. When something special has to be asked of the allies, he suggests the best way to appeal to their self-interest. Sometimes Kryzantos can express my deepest thoughts better than I can myself, and he's happier about my success than I am."

"By the gods," said Hestifer slyly, "how glad I am that I asked! Only one thing puzzles me: How can I demonstrate that my happiness in your success is even greater than his? Shall I clap my hands and sing—or what?"

"Dance the Persian dance, of course," said Kryzantos, and everyone burst out laughing.

After the wine went round one more time, I put a question to the old Assyrian warrior who was one of my great favorites. "Tell me, Gobryas, about yourself and your daughter. Are you as ready to give your daughter to one of my friends now as you were on the day when I first saw her?"

"Well," said Gobryas, "am I also free to tell the truth?"

"Certainly," I said.

"All right, then," said Gobryas. "I'm far readier to give her in marriage this evening."

“And what’s your reason for that, old friend?”

Keep Insolence at Bay

“It’s simple,” he began. “When we first met, I was deeply impressed by the way your men endured hardship and peril, but today I see something even more impressive—their humility in the midst of success. In my experience, men who respond to good fortune with modesty and kindness are harder to find than those who face adversity with courage. For in the very nature of things, success tends to create pride and blindness in the hearts of men, while suffering teaches them to be patient and strong.”

“Well spoken, Gobryas!” exclaimed Kryzantos, and I was happy to agree.

When I judged the moment ripe I ordered my attendants to distribute the gifts that I’d chosen for my guests. I had them give an elaborate dress to Tigranes the Armenian as a reward for his wife, because she’d followed the army with a courage all her own. The Sakian chieftain received a golden goblet, and a swift warhorse went to the Hyrcanian leader. Many other splendid gifts were offered, and none of my worthy friends was forgotten.

At last I said, “Gobryas, I have something very special for you tonight. I’m going to make good on my promise to you.”

In fact, I’d already chosen Hestifer to be the bridegroom, and I had also secured Hestifer’s enthusiastic agreement. At this point he was supposed to rise, go to the old Assyrian, and ask to become his son-in-law. Instead, he got carried away and cried out, “It’s me, Gobryas! I’m going to marry your daughter!”

“Hestifer would surely meet with my daughter’s approval!” Gobryas proclaimed.

I laughed heartily, and all my friends joined in the merriment. When we had quieted down, I took the right hand of Hestifer and laid it in the hand of Gobryas, and thus the pledge was sealed. I then allotted many beautiful gifts for Hestifer to give to his bride.

The banquet ended on this high note, with everyone looking forward to the wedding day of Hestifer and his bride. As the guests rose, I stood up with them and saw them to the door.

Suddenly, before anyone could leave, I paused, wondering if I dared to express the sense of humility that God had suddenly inspired in my heart. After a moment I felt compelled to let God speak.

“Your leader is only one man,” I heard my voice say. “His strength is no more supernatural than your own, nor is his virtue, and by himself he could never preserve the good things that belong by right to everyone. To govern well, he must have your help—the help of his true, trustworthy friends. You must forever be worthy of his trust, and you must raise up true friends of your own, to help you carry your own burdens. And it is love that must bind all of

us together.”

Distribute Wealth Widely

The next day I arranged for the members of the allied armies to return to their homes—all except those who preferred to live with me in Babylon. To these special liegemen, who were Medes and Hyrcanians for the most part, I gave large grants of rich local land. I loaded those who were leaving us with presents, sending away both officers and men satisfied.

I distributed great wealth among my own ranking officers, with choice gifts going to my generals. The rest of the riches were given out in equal shares, with each colonel receiving enough bounty to divide with his subordinates. As the distribution continued downward, the sergeants presented each private with what he deserved. In this way every soldier in the army received a fair share.

Now that the empire had a working government, it was safe for me to visit Persia. When the march had brought us into Media, I went to see Syazarees. After we met and embraced, I assured my royal uncle that a palace in Babylon, plus an estate outside the city, had been reserved for him. They would be ready whenever he chose to inspect them, for they were staffed and overseen by trustworthy Medes who owed their chief allegiance to him.

I then offered Syazarees several more rich gifts. My uncle, who had obviously adapted to the new status quo, seemed at ease in his own heart, and he accepted my presents gladly, promising to come and see his Babylonian properties as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

Then, for once in my life, I was caught completely off guard. At a word from Syazarees, his delightful daughter Amatia came forth carrying a golden crown and bejeweled bracelets and a chain of wrought gold and a many-colored Median robe, and all these things were splendid beyond imagination.

Mixing Marriage and Alliance

The enchanting maiden placed the crown upon my head, and as she did so, Syazarees said, “I am giving her to you, Cyrus. I am giving you my own daughter to be your wife. Your father Cambyses wedded my sister Myndane, and you are their son. This is Amatia, the little child whom you held in your arms when you were here as a lad. Ever since then, whenever she was asked who would be her husband, she would always answer ‘Cyrus!’ For her dowry she has my kingdom of Media in its entirety, since I have no lawful son.”

Surprised and dazzled, I answered, “Syazarees, I thank you for everything you’re offering me—my serene and beguiling cousin Amatia, the inheritance of your kingdom, and these gifts of unsurpassed magnificence. But first,

before I accept, I must be advised by my father and my mother.”

When I reached the Persian frontier, I encamped my army and went forward with my friends to my father’s city of Pasargadae, leading enough sacrificial animals for a grand festival. I brought rich gifts for my father and my mother and the friends of my youth. I also bore valuable presents for the high officers of state, the elders, and all the peers. I even carried silver coins for the commoners, right down to the shepherds in the distant hills.

After the ceremony of presentation, my father spoke to the elders and the chief officers of the land, saying, “People of Persia and Cyrus my son, I cherish you both, for I am the king of my people as much as the father of my son. Tradition and law decree that I tell you what you should know, and this is what I say to you now: In the past this nation gave Cyrus an army to use in the rescue of Media from the Assyrians. He did much more than that. With the aid of the gods, Cyrus has made us Persians famous all over the world by his leadership, and he has given Persia a crown of glory brighter than it has ever worn before.”

Listen to the Warnings of the Wise

Here, predictably, there was applause of great magnitude, yet the solemnity of my father’s voice kept anyone from cheering wildly. “By teaching his men to fight on horseback,” continued Cambyse, “Cyrus has won the plains of the world for the greater glory of Persia. His victories made him rich, and he has richly rewarded the multitudes under his command.”

At this point Cambyse commanded me to rise, and I stood up proudly, expecting my father to break into a song of praise that would ever after serve as a guide to my virtues. Imagine my chagrin when I realized that something else was coming my way!

“Cyrus,” said my father in an overpowering voice, “if your heart and the hearts of your men remain pure, you’ll prove a great blessing to the world, as well as a source of great happiness to each other. But if you, my son, are conquered by conceit and attempt to rule by your own strong hand, you’ll destroy not only yourself but entire nations.”

I blushed then as I never blushed before or after, so unexpected were my father’s words of warning. I was afraid that the tongue lashing would continue, but my father quickly moved on to scold the Persian nobility, warning them that anyone who attempted to drive me from my throne would be cursed forever.

Be Ever True to Solemn Vows

Soon my embarrassment abated entirely, for I realized that my father had

intended the shock value of his words to protect the people, not to degrade me or the peerage. Now Cambyses counseled us to offer sacrifice together and to call upon the gods to witness our new covenant. “You, Cyrus,” he instructed, “shall vow to defend Persia against anyone who attacks us or tries to overthrow our laws,” he commanded, and I was quick to assent.

Turning to the peers, Cambyses said, “You must promise that, if Cyrus’ rule in Babylon is threatened, you’ll send him whatever aid he asks for.”

Then came the ultimate confirmation of my father’s blessing. “As long as I live,” Cambyses announced, “the crown of Persia is mine. As soon as I die Cyrus will inherit my kingdom, and whenever he visits Persia he will offer sacrifice on behalf of all the Persian people, even as I do now. When he is abroad, you who remain here will offer sacrifices for his safety.”

Cambyses finished speaking, and the elders of Persia and I agreed to be ruled by his wishes, confirming the covenant and calling the gods to be our witnesses. When this was done, I said a fond farewell to my homeland and went back to Media, carrying written proof that my parents had accepted Syazarees’s offer of his daughter. Thus I founded a great dynasty by marrying my cousin Amatia, and the fame of her beauty and charity was celebrated far and wide.

Balance the Power of Your Highest-Ranking Officials

Upon my return to Babylon, I decided to appoint new governors and set them over the tribes that I’d conquered and absorbed into my empire. Yet I was unusual in retaining direct control over the commanders of the imperial citadels and the captains in charge of the imperial garrisons. It was a move that guaranteed my power more surely than anything else I ever did, for if an ambitious governor formed an army of rebellion, my loyalists would quickly arrive to frustrate his bid for independence.

I convened a council in Babylon, assembling all of my leading men to explain the conditions under which the new governors would rule. I aimed to ensure that no man would accept an appointment before learning of the restrictions that would help me balance his power. In that way, a new governor would know from the beginning that my methods were a matter of policy, not of personal mistrust.

At the council I spoke as follows, “Gentlemen and friends, you’re aware that we have garrisons and commanders in all the cities of our commonwealth. They’ve been there since the days of our first conquests, obeying their orders to guard the fortifications and not to interfere with anything else. There’s no reason to remove them from their commands, for they’ve all done their duty. At this point, I’m also going to name new governors to each of these cities—honest men to enforce the laws, collect the taxes, pay the garrisons, and control the expenditures for the entire province.

Those of you who accept my call to assume these duties will be given imposing houses in your capitals and pleasant homes on your estates, where you can keep your families in comfort.”

Later on, when I learned which of my friends were willing to serve as governors under the conditions prescribed, I selected those I thought best qualified for the work. My chief appointment was to send Kryzantos to Lydia, where he moved into the former palace of Croesus in Sardis and ruled with efficiency and wisdom. The people of his province came to love him more than the kings of their own blood and, after his death, many of them worshipped him as a god.

Each governor was ordered to lead his nobles out to hunt and train his followers to be superior warriors. I announced, “When I discover which of you can assemble the greatest number of chariots and maintain the finest force of cavalry, I will honor him as my chief ally.”

The best men, I instructed my governors, “should always be shown the most honor at your courts, just as they are at mine.” I added, “Let your own table be as welcoming as mine is—not only for your own household but for your friends and allies as well, and recognize anyone who works hard for the empire. Like me, you must create spacious new parks where there’s now wilderness, you must breed prey for the hunt in those parks, and you must never sit down to eat until you’ve exercised both your body and your mind.”

BOOK XVIII

THE WISDOM OF THE AGES

I gave my governors an additional incentive to excel by having each province examined annually by an inspector general from the army. This practice helped bring any insolent governors—and I inadvertently appointed a few of them—to their senses. If a governor had been slow to send me tribute, or to protect his people, or to cultivate his soil—or whatever his omission might have been—my inspector general arrived to set his province in order.

Whenever the inspector encountered a problem that seemed beyond his own powers to resolve, he reported the matter to me, and I personally wrote out new instructions for the governor. My inspectors became known as the “king’s brothers,” and their untiring efforts made my realm a good deal more just and prosperous than it would otherwise have been.

I devised other arrangements to ensure that my vast empire would be well governed. Since timely knowledge of developing crises is often so critical, I set up a system that kept me informed about unexpected events, even when they occurred at the remotest corners of my empire. First, I determined how far the average horse in the army’s stables could travel in a day without being ridden to exhaustion, and then I had a series of postal stations built, one day’s ride apart.

My governors supplied relays of horses as well as grooms to care for them. A reliable man was placed in charge of each station; receiving the weary messenger and his mount, he would take the dispatches and hand them on, furnishing a fresh horse and rider for the next leg of the journey. I upgraded roads all over the empire so that the post need never pause, not even by night.

I always chose to live toward the center of my empire and spent seven months in warm, sunny Babylon during the winter season and three months in temperate Susa during the flowering time. The height of summer found me at home in my palace in the mountains of Media.

The spirit of creative thought thrived throughout my realm, and year by year my new civilization flourished. Whatever their origins or tribe, talented managers, engineers, and artists were rapidly recognized and promoted, so new blood flowed through the veins of my dominions, and it brought new life to all my people.

Beautiful gifts were always arriving at my royal residences. My subject peoples were constantly sending me the treasures of their land—plants or animals or works of invention and art. Every private person counted himself blessed if he could do me some special service.

The Messenger in the Dream

Thus the years and decades rolled on, and as an old man I journeyed to Persia for the seventh time in my reign, though lately I had known nights when I felt ill beyond imagination. My beloved father and mother had long since died in the course of nature. I honored their graves and offered sacrifice according to the laws of my homeland, leading the sacred dance in the tradition of my forefathers. Then I distributed gifts to each of my countrymen.

As I lay asleep on my bed in the royal palace at Pasargadae in Persia, I dreamed a dream. It seemed that a golden winged messenger from God approached me and said, “The time has come, Cyrus, and now you will journey to the next world, which is a higher and more peaceful place than the one you now inhabit.”

I awoke out of sleep with a start, feeling more awed than threatened, and I knew beyond any doubt that the end of my life was at hand. I had almost been ready to return to Babylon, but now I knew that death would overtake me here in my native land.

Immediately I offered sacrifice to the gods of my fathers and the great God who encompasses them all. I made the blood of the animals flow over a mighty stone altar and into a roaring fire as I said this prayer, “God and all you gods, please accept this sacrifice, my offering for all the good things that have filled my life. I thank you from the depths of my heart for the grace you have shown me, inspiring me throughout my life, allowing me to know what things I ought to do, and where I ought to stay my hand. My gratitude is very deep, for you have kept me from spoiling my heart with pride, even in the greatest prosperity. I beseech you now to bless my children also, and my sweet wife, and my friends, and all my realm.”

I had expected my prayers to lift up my heart, but the shadow of lassitude laid waste my powers of spirit. My attendants helped me back to my bed, for I longed to rest. When the hour had come, they tried to make me take my bath, but I told them that I needed sleep far more. Other attendants came afterward, at the usual time, to set my meal before me. To their alarm I couldn’t bring myself to eat. My thirst, though, was great, and I drank without pain, taking a little wine with water from artesian wells.

It was the same the second day and the third, and I lay there longing for my wife, Amatia. She had remained in Babylon with health problems of her own, which she bore with great fortitude. Physicians fussed around me, but I told them I no longer needed their services. “Go relieve the suffering of the poor” were my last words to these wise men.

Set Your House in Order

On the fourth day I called my two sons to my side, for both had accompanied

me to Persia. I also summoned my closest companions and the highest officials of the land and, when they stood before me, I struggled to speak my mind.

“My sons, and friends of mine, the end of my life is at hand, as I can tell by many signs. I have been blessed. When I was a child, I knew all the joys of childhood, and I reaped the treasures of youth as I grew up. As a man I enjoyed all the benefits of my special birth. My powers grew ever greater with the passage of the years, and it’s hard to recall anything I attempted or desired that I failed to achieve, for I made my friends happy and crushed my enemies beneath my feet.”

Now I had something to say that I knew would surprise my listeners, even my sons. “I was haunted all my life,” I admitted, “by a strange sense of unease. At times this dread fastened itself to me for months at a time. Yet even this feeling served me well. It kept reminding me that, despite my rank, I was only a man—a man who might at any time be seized by the power of evil.”

My confession brought me an immediate sense of relief. I had finally given up my deepest secret, one that I had longed to share.

“If I die now,” I said, again to all alike, “I leave my sons behind me—the sons that God has given me—and

I leave my homeland and friends in peace. I hope that the peoples of the empire will cherish my memory.”

I motioned to an attendant, and he held a goblet to my lips so I could moisten my throat. Then I turned and gazed upon my sons—Cambyases, named after my own father, and Tanazares, whose name had been chosen by my wife.

“Now I must leave instructions about my kingdom, that there may be no fighting between you after my death. My sons,” I said, “I love you both the same, but I choose you, Cambyases, the older, to take my place as emperor. The gods themselves have chosen you as the firstborn, and for this moment and a few more, I remain on earth to lend you my support.”

My vision was dimming now, and I could only see my sons through a fog. Turning to my younger son, I said, “Tanazares, I appoint you governor over the Medes, the Armenians, and the Cadousians. Though I leave your older brother with the imperial throne and the name of Great King, your inheritance will bring you more happiness than his. The empire is facing new challenges. The weight of many burdens will fall on your brother’s shoulders, and his duties will leave him little time to enjoy his life.”

My head and neck suddenly became too stiff to turn, so I had to shift my failing eyes to gaze again at the new king. “You, Cambyases, must never forget that the empire isn’t guarded by magic. If you succeed, it will only be through the strength of your faithful friends. Think of how well I was served by such noble souls as Mandarus and Kryzantos. You must never imagine that such loyal hearts spring up like grass in the field. No, every leader must actively

raise up his followers, and you must win their hearts by the kindness that springs from love.”

Comradeship Makes All the World One

I asked my sons to join hands, which they did after kneeling at my bedside. “When you, Cambyases, seek friends to stand by you and guard your throne, look first to Tanazares.”

To my surprise, I thought then of my friend Abadice, who perished in his attempt to scatter the hosts of Egypt on the battlefield. It was only in the year prior to my death that I realized what a legend Abadice had become. As I was returning from the hunt on horseback in my rough-and-ready clothes, I was stopped in the streets of Babylon by a stalwart band of young boys. They asked if I was the Great King, and I acknowledged that I was.

“Then you knew Abadice, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I knew him, and I was proud to know him. He was a great man. I only wish I’d had the chance to know him better.”

“Was he a greater warrior than you?” one of the boys asked.

I paused for only a moment. “He was,” I assured them. “He was the greatest warrior who ever lived.”

Most of the boys cheered. Then, suddenly, all of them dispersed into the alleyways.

From that time forward the memory of Abadice had often played on my mind. He laid down his life for my cause, even though he must have suspected that Pantheia would follow him through the gates of death.

As I moved through the final months of my earthly existence, I thought more and more of the many men who had perished in the cause of the commonwealth. I was so relieved that I had never betrayed my dead—had never given them reason to haunt my nights in menacing forms with accusations of bad faith.

Now here I was, allowed to die in peace because I had always honored their memory. They had perished so the world could be guided by a shining example of good government, a government perfected by my comrades under my direction and with the blessing of the gods, a government that can still serve as a model for all those who thirst for justice.

Even as my body and soul began to split asunder, I found new words for my sons, my friends, and the posterity of the nations. “Consider this,” I said. “Though you’ve never seen my soul with your earthly eyes, you’ve felt its presence through all I am and all I’ve done. The pain that I’m suffering now, I suffer alone, but the virtues that lived in me will live on in everyone who cherishes my achievements. For your own sakes—I beg you—act in such a way that my spirit will always be proud of you. Haven’t you heard of the terrors that troubled spirits can visit on the guilty? Do you think the dead

would still be honored if their souls were as lifeless as they seem to the ignorant?"

The utter uniqueness of the moment suddenly filled my heart with bliss. The two worlds, the world of spirit and the world of nature, which often seem so alien to one another, were converging in the room where I lay dying. An aura of power glowed around my deathbed, and what I felt was not pride but extreme humility.

"Will you take my hands and clasp them in yours?" I asked my sons. Still kneeling, they did so, but by now my hands were cold and hardly felt the warmth of theirs.

Reverence God and the Human Race

Seeing that my lips were dry, one of my attendants came forward with my cup and helped me take a few sips of water. A little refreshed, I said, "If my own spirit endures, how much more does God endure, the Lord who created and sustains the order of this universe, who is boundless in beauty and splendor."

Suddenly my eyes were bright again and golden sunlight filled the room, thought I had thought the world had passed into night. I looked at my sons and saw how closely their handsome features were modeled on those of their mother's father Syazarees, who had been dead these many years. I realized then, for the first time, how central to my own existence Syazarees had been.

"If God requires reverence," I continued, "so does the human race, and you must treat all people with benevolence. As great men, your deeds will be known to all humankind. If you are righteous, everyone will call you blessed."

I had to pause and let my throat and lungs rest, so that I would have the strength to deliver my last words. Finally I said, "When I am dead, don't bury my body in an expensive coffin. Just give it back to the earth. What can be better than lying in the lap of the mother and nurse of all beautiful things? And now," I added, "my spirit has already departed from the parts of my body that she leaves first. If you want to take my hand once more, or look into my eyes while life is still there, approach me now. But when I've covered my face, let no man look on me again—not even you, my sons."

Benevolent shadows hovered around me. I said, "Comfort everyone who comes to honor me in death, telling them that I've been liberated from all suffering and sorrow. Good-bye, dear sons, and bid your blessed mother, Amatia, farewell for me, until we meet again."

